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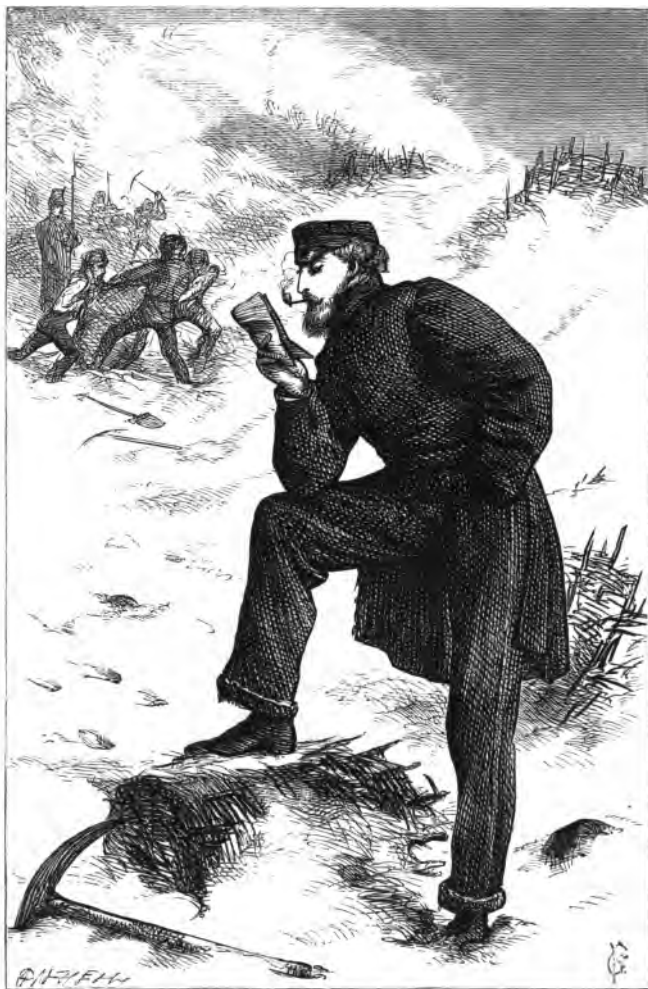
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RATES AND TAXES.



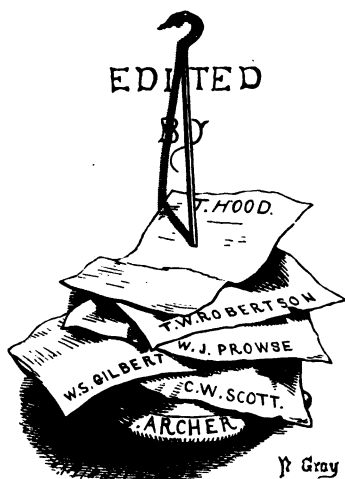
"Anthony was in the trenches when he heard of their marriage."

PAGE 98.

RATES AND TAXES

AND

HOW THEY WERE COLLECTED.



LONDON:
GROOMBRIDGE AND SONS
PATERNOSTER ROW.

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PREFACE.



ENCOURAGED by the success of last year's venture, the authors of "The Bunch of Keys" once more make their bow to an indulgent public, and hope that an acquaintance of a year's standing will be held sufficient to warrant them in wishing their readers a seasonable "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!"

Following the plan adopted in "The Bunch of Keys," they have not attempted

to interweave the opening story too closely with its successors, believing that—except in rare instances—such attempts have hampered and weakened the interest of the individual tales. With regard to the choice of title, they are lead to imagine, even from their own modest experiences, that “Rates and Taxes” are, alas! things that come home to every man.

The writer of these lines, looking back to the introduction of “The Bunch of Keys,” finds it there said that “this Christmas volume is the growth of friendly communion, of pleasant chats of an evening, of fellowship of taste and feeling.” He is very grateful to know that those words may be prefixed to this volume also. Dis-

cord and a darker shade—that may have been nearer to some of us—have passed by the little circle of friends, who thus once again submit the result of their united labours to the public.

T. H.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
RATES AND TAXES: HOW THEY WERE COL- LECTED. <i>By Thomas Archer.</i>	
CHAPTER I.—ST. BARABBAS, SQUASHLEIGH.....	1
CHAPTER II.—THE NEW CULATE.....	10
CHAPTER III.—THE TRIAL BY FIRE	38
LIKE TO LIKE, A STORY TOLD BY THE WATER- RATE IN NINE SMALL INSTALMENTS	
<i>By W. J. Prowse.</i>	
I.—ANTHONY HARDING, HERO-WORSHIPPER	63
II.—ANTHONY HARDING'S HERO	66

	PAGE
III.—MISS CAROLINE EDWARDS.....	71
IV.—THREE STORMY HEARTS IN CALM WEATHER.....	75
V.—AN EXPLOSION	79
VI.—AFTER THE STORM.....	84
VII.—CLEARING UP.....	90
VIII.—A LETTER.....	93
IX.—IN THE GARDEN BY THE SEA.....	93

THE DOG-TAX: THE TRUE STORY OF CÆSAR AND

BRUTUS.

By Tom Hood.

CHAPTER I.—THE DOCTOR'S DOG.....	97
CHAPTER II.—THE CURATE'S DOG	115
CHAPTER III.—THE BANKER'S DOG	129
CHAPTER IV.—NOBODY'S DOG	144

THE POOR-RATE UNFOLDS A TALE.

By T. W. Robertson. 157

CONTENTS.

xi

PAGE

THE INCOME-TAX READS A STORY, FOUND IN A DRAWER, AND CALLED "MAXWELL AND I."

By W. S. Gilbert.

CHAPTER I	187
CHAPTER II.....	201
CHAPTER III.	216

ANOTHER PAROCHIAL READS THREE CHAPTERS OF A POLICEMAN'S MS. *By Clement W. Scott.*

CHAPTER I.	233
CHAPTER II.....	241
CHAPTER III.	260

UNITED SQUASHLEIGH

By Thomas Archer. 269

**RATES AND TAXES,
AND HOW THEY WERE COLLECTED.**

By THOMAS ARCHER.

RATES AND TAXES, AND HOW THEY WERE COLLECTED.

CHAPTER I.

SAINT BARABBAS, SQUASHLEIGH.

It was all very well to speak of them in the notices of Rates due on the last quarter-day, as the united parishes of St. Barabbas and Ananias the Less ; but people no more believed in their unity than they did in the correctness of the Assessment, or the honesty of the Collectors, or the skill of the Doctors, or the orthodoxy of the Rector, or the piety of the Dissenting hierarch, or the liberality of the Lord of the Manor. There was, in fact, only one sort of unity in Squashleigh, and that was represented by the determination of each individual to bestow no confidence on anybody else. Suspicion was the principal element in the moral atmosphere of the parishioners, and as suspicion was only tempered by indifference, Squashleigh was a nice place to live in, and in some sort justified the expression of opinion communicated

by a sceptical cobbler in the tap-room of "The Retriever," that "we was gone from bad to wuss, and we should soon go from wuss to nothink."

Squashleigh lay under the disadvantage of being a part of London, with a sort of general affectation of the country; and its two parishes extended from the neighbourhood of a crowded and poverty-stricken metropolitan district, to a suburb where a couple of very dingy swans disported in a pond, and in which the houses, once the abodes of great bankers and merchants, when the place was really "out of town," fell back behind gardens or forecourts full of trembling trees, or great gloomy masses of evergreen. The main street, which seemed to have borrowed some of the manners and customs of the wretched neighbourhood just referred to, swarmed on Saturday nights with hucksters' stalls, and then the tradespeople of the shops forgot themselves so far as to imitate the driving of a "roaring trade" by lighting extra gas, and making a great bustle outside their premises; but on other days they all reverted to their original dignity, and lest anybody should suppose that they had so far forgotten themselves as to establish a precedent of civility and attention, devoted Monday to the making out of bills, and the utter disregard of such orders as were most urgent. The railway, which had cut and carved, and howled and shrieked most of the gentlefolks away from the town-end of the place, had also contributed its occasional nuisances in the shape of London roughs who landed there on their way to sporting taverns.

Although Squashleigh had been one of the strongholds of Nonconformity from the time when the Dissenters held their meeting with drawn swords in a disused gravel-pit, to the day when an aged and representative pastor of an Independent church retired with all his honours full upon him, and a thousand pounds in a purse knitted by the ladies of the congregation, and presented through his wife, who had added an ample fortune to his own very handsome property, it was also notorious for a good old port wine and Conservative rector of St. Barabbas, and an incumbent of newly-developed High Church tendencies in the neighbouring parish.

The rector, who gave expression to his Conservative and true-blue sentiments by keeping a marvellous collection of sticks and riding-whips in a rack in the hall, confined himself to the intonation of the service as a means of conciliating what might be popular opinion; but at the more distant church there were chantings, and robes, and bowings, and turnings, and genuflexions, and at length, to the indignation of the churchwardens, and the horror of the congregation who had subscribed to build the sacred edifice, a full choral service in which nobody could join but the paid performers. The result of this would have been to drive everybody to dissent, but for the marvellous number of churches and chapels where all shades and degrees of opinion could be accommodated.

There were High, and Low, and Broad churches; Iron churches, Free churches, Congregational

churches; Independents, Baptists, Wesleyans; Primitive Methodists, who listened to pastors preaching without their coats and in violent perspirations; Plymouth Brethren, who advertised that the gospel was preached every Sabbath evening in a builder's workshop; a Roman Catholic chapel; a Conventicle, built as a speculation by a resident land agent on his own front garden; and private prayer meetings (to which the public were invited), held in the front parlour of one of the smallest houses in the parish. Then there was "a great door opened" for field preaching, since on Sunday afternoons a number of idle unwashed fanatics, who professed to be working men, and secularists guiding their conduct by rationalism, assembled in a muddy common, flanked by a pair of public-houses, and gave utterance to their views, which, although they individually differed on most points, generally agreed with wonderful unanimity in the desire to abolish the laws and to stone the prophets.

It will scarcely be matter for surprise, therefore, that amidst all these varieties of religious denominations there was a good deal of denunciation going on, and when the successor of the venerable gentleman at the old-fashioned dissenting "place of worship" boldly advocated advanced views, and expressed a doubt of everlasting punishment, he became the centre of a moral persecution, which showed that Squashleigh held very firmly to the chief privilege of its creed, and that all sects could for once combine against a mutual danger.

When it is added that the sceptical cobbler before referred to, and who seemed to have formed his views on an objection to pay rent and a perusal of an abridged edition of Tom Paine's works, opened a room in an empty house, under the title of the "*Senatorium*" (with a dim sense of combining health and the republic in one concise expression), and there inveighed against things in general, it will be seen that the social, mental, and moral improvement of the people was diligently cared for.

Paine

As Squashleigh had the reputation of being a healthy suburb, it can scarcely be thought remarkable that it abounded in doctors, who were for the most part divided in opinion, and who, as they frequently found themselves called in to attend each other's patients (the instability of Squashleigh in the matter of Physic being perhaps a set off against its fixity in regard to Divinity), were accustomed to speak of each other with no little freedom.

The parochial authorities, however, were the great representatives of the public spirit; and though the vestry continued to agree, inasmuch as it was recognized that the longer each member of the board kept in office the more easily could the administration of subordinates be controlled, and an unquestioned influence established, those subordinates quarrelled among themselves with an intensity which culminated in open warfare within the very doors of the Union, from which the medical officer was eventually excluded, much to the relief of some of the sick paupers, while a commission

Squashleigh

from the Poor Law Board sat on the conduct of everybody, and made a report of which nothing particular ever came.

It was at this juncture that the series of events happened which was destined to influence the future history of Squashleigh, and were, in fact, the causes which led indirectly to the publication of the present volume. It is not necessary to stay here to moralize on occurrences, small in themselves, which become the fulcrums on which the Archimedean levers turn ; the thin ends of all sorts of upheaving wedges ; the hidden springs of perpetual motion ; the casual seeds of future harvests ; the first rill of a leakage which ultimately becomes a mountain-torrent bearing all before it.

Enough, that the foundation-stone of the new Town Hall was laid.

That the Queen's Taxes and a Collector had absconded and taken the money with them.

That the receipts and accounts were so garbled that a fresh levy was announced.

That the parochial rates were to undergo a rigid investigation previous to being raised.

That the common was to be enclosed and let for building.

And that the Conservative rector having been promoted to a living in the country, a new curate was appointed to officiate at St. Barabbas.

With respect to the Town Hall, that in itself was enough to set the united parishes by the ears ; and while a corpulent leatherseller, who had been an

unsuccessful candidate for churchwarden, was heard to speak of it as a dirty underhand job, brought about by the underhand influence of the architect's uncle, the cobbler took occasion to hold forth on three consecutive nights, at the Senatorium, on what he called "the erection of the new pie-ram-med, cemented with the blood of the people."

In all these disputes the "Squashleigh Combatant" (published every Saturday, price one penny, and the best medium for advertisements) played the part of a free press, by inserting letters for which nobody was to be held responsible. There were terrible charges against "wolves in sheep clothing," referring to the visitation of the sick by the ministers of the Establishment, and signed "No Popery;" and there were damaging questions asked by correspondents, who concealed their truculence under a bland request "to be permitted to inquire," or a mild statement that it "may be desirable to remind." The editorial department of the "Combatant," which was supposed to be under the control of the printer, consisted of a feeble effort to conciliate everybody, which of course brought down upon it universal contempt, although its circulation was secured by the desire of each separate party to see what the other party had to say in reply to the last "scathing disclosure."

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW CURATE.

THE new Town Hall was planned and the site chosen before united Squashleigh was aware of it, and when it was suddenly announced in the columns of the "Combatant" that the united boards had forgotten smaller animosities to join in the completion of a work which would increase the importance of the whole neighbourhood, united Squashleigh also awoke to the fact that the parochial money had been voted to pay for it, and that the event was to be celebrated by a remarkably snug and exclusive dinner on the following Wednesday, to which only a few of the most influential parishioners were to be invited to meet the Board.

About this dinner, and various other snug gatherings which had been held in anticipation of the great occasion, some sharp words had passed already at the meeting convened by the leatherseller and a compact party of non-contents, led by a retired schoolmaster. The wine merchant and the butcher both required to know whether a number of gentlemen could be expected to give their time and talents to parochial business without having a dinner together now and then. The plumber, who had contrived to become the lessee of a good deal of house property in the neighbourhood, said he wasn't a-going to give all his trouble for nothing,

without having a bit of paltry lunch or a glass of paltry wine; and when real gentlemen was on the Board it was shameful to expect 'em to do it. The schoolmaster shrugged his shoulders, and said, "*Noblesse oblige*," which, nobody understanding, the poulterer declared that whether anybody was less obliged or not, them as didn't like it could lump it, for the Board had got the money and they meant to do what they liked with it.

So they had, and so they did; for the preparations went on apace, and the estimates for the new building were passed—as one of the Board said—"like winking;" for by the following Wednesday morning the space on a scrubby patch of ground lying off the main street was all full of blocks of stone, and cranes, and scaffolding, and men in white jackets were dividing their time between putting up a tent and drinking beer from a two-gallon can; and a mob of boys surrounded the hoarding, and a human eye was stationed at every crevice and knot-hole through which a glimpse of the interior could be obtained; and the architect and contractor had each appeared in a white waistcoat to superintend the last of the preparations; and a special number of the "Combatant" was advertised, but owing to a strike of the printing staff—consisting of three men and a boy—didn't come out; and a long file of pastrycooks' men and waiters were seen going into the doors of the "White Hart," where the dinner was to take place in the old Assembly Room. It was currently re-

ported that the Lord of the Manor, who was in Scotland, had sent no end of venison for the repast; and it became a subject for lively speculation, what would be done with the remnants of the feast to which nobody was invited but the Board and their intimate friends, except the architect, the contractor, and the clerk of the works, who sat at a side-table with the editor of the "Combatant," and supplied that gentleman with all the particulars of the intended structure for what he called his "next issue."

"The day broke gloomily," as the old historian remarks of the occasion when men met in Guildhall to listen to Richard III., and, as he further intimates, "the lowering of the people's faces" seemed to suit the aspect of the weather.

Only the day before, the new notices of assessment had been left by the tax-collectors, and as it was close to quarter-day the calls had also been made for the parochial rates, most of which were levied in advance. Small householders, with incomes barely sufficient to meet their expenses at the best of times, found a truculent individual in waiting in their front gardens, with a demand for immediate payment of a tax of which the last collector had omitted to leave any legal notice; and as they had either to find the money at once, or receive another truculent gentleman as an inmate until the claim was settled and the man in possession paid out, the curses of united Squashleigh were both loud and deep. It seemed as though the tax-

gatherers had determined to avenge their damaged reputation by a simultaneous onslaught; and three brokers' men were about with light carts in several of the back thoroughfares, while the water was being cut off in all directions, and the gas company's servants were taking inventories against auctioneers' clerks with a spirited animosity which was only equalled by that of the parishioners against the parochial officers, and of the tax-collectors against each other. The higher developments of friendship had seldom had much scope for their full growth in Squashleigh; but had they been never so flourishing, the suspicions that were engendered in the three days preceding that memorable Wednesday would have withered them root and branch.

There was only one topic of conversation which occasionally relieved the gloomy oppression of the forthcoming ceremony.

Had anybody seen the new parson?

Yes; several people had seen him about yesterday, and nobody could make much of him. He seemed to have begun visiting in the parish before he'd been there above an hour or two; and what was more, he'd declined the offer of a holiday for the fortnight before the rector went away, and had come at once from Oxford, where he'd been visiting some friends. More than that, he'd taken lodgings over the Circulating Library, and Miss Truffles had heard him laughing as he looked round the shelves in her shop, because, as he said afterwards, he'd found out that her library was a good

deal like Squashleigh—the third volumes were mostly missing, and everybody was waiting to be happy and to make it up all round. Mrs. Whiffin, who dealt in mourning, was sure that he would be a great acquisition to the neighbourhood if he had such a flow of spirits; to which the chemist, who had come to the door for the purpose of seeing the effect of a new coloured bottle in his window, and now joined the group of neighbours assembled at the grocer's, where a good view was to be obtained of the tent inside the inclosure, replied that he had called on him the night before for a bottle of soda water, and seemed to be a capital fellow.

The conjunction of these remarks not being immediately obvious, a diversion was made by an inquiry on the part of Mrs. Whiffin's assistant, which was silenced by a loud "hem!" on the part of the chemist, who became suddenly occupied in the examination of his own shop-window.

In fact, the subject of their discourse was at that moment coming along the street at a good round pace, looking about him as he went with a somewhat humorous smile.

He was a rather tall and well-built young man, of about eight-and-twenty, with brown earnest eyes, the darkened tint beneath which would have told more painfully in a pale face, but was almost lost amidst a tinge of sunburn, which seemed to have just browned his cheeks, and to have left the high white temples that it might crisp his closely cut hair. There was an active swing in his walk, that at once

revealed the practised pedestrian, and, though his dress was of dark cloth, and of clerical fashion, his neckerchief was loosely tied, and he held his black gloves in a hand which, though large, and with that sinewy look that shows a fair power of grip, had in its lines the signs of that finer nervous force which comes of high breeding, or one might almost say of high culture, and is a strength which is often too like weakness.

With two or three glances he had taken in the whole group, and before they were well aware of it was standing talking to them with a frank ease and yet an unmistakable refinement which seemed to act like a charm. He seemed to have addressed himself to each of them individually, and yet had scarcely spoken a dozen words to them all, then he had turned with a salute composed of bow and nod, and with the bright smile still upon his face was swinging down the street again before they had quite come out of their flutter of surprise.

"He's what I should call a tidy sort for a parson," said a sporting publican, who happened to be looking through his bar window, to a friend who understood "the fancy."

"Hits out well from the shoulder I'll pound it," said Fancy, regarding the retreating figure with one eye, "and reg'lar good in the lines; what ain't boatin' 's cricket, and what ain't cricket 's gloves."

"Well, he's quite the gentleman at any rate, if I know what a gentleman is," said Mrs. Whiffin.

"Bless me how fast he walks ! whatever is his name, Mr. Still ?"

"Left me a card last night with his address on it," said Mr. Still, fumbling in his waistcoat pocket. "Oh here it is—Cyril Smith."

"What ?" said Mrs. Whiffin, "Cyril—what ?"

"No, Smith," replied the chemist.

"Well I never ! I should ha' thought it would ha' been Harcourt, or something of that."

"Yes," chimed in the assistant, plaintively, "or Mortimer at the very least."

They were both subscribers to Miss Truffles' library, and the pieces of lining that were constantly found between the leaves of the volumes were evidence that they had gone through the entire stock of three-volume novels.

Mr. Gollick, vestryman and poulterer, had passed a rather anxious morning, for not only had he been up ever since four o'clock endeavouring to prepare a speech, which when delivered at the dinner, in his capacity of vice-chairman, would prove beyond dispute what he had frequently asserted, that "if the parish of Saint Barabbas was only true to itself it could hold up its head secure under the protection of that constitutional government,"—and there he stopped because it became necessary to use the words "under which we live," and then there would be "under" twice in the same sentence, which, as Mr. Gollick justly explained to Mrs. Gollick, would be "toretollergy as was not allowable on an occasion like the present."

This unfortunate sentence was the source of so much anxiety to the worthy vestryman, that he was at length induced to listen to the persuasions of the partner of his bosom, who advised him to adopt a more agreeable method of inspiration, by means of a good stiff glass of brandy and water, leaving the rest to "the spur of the moment."

As this alternative was not presented before half-past eleven, and the ceremony of laying the stone was to take place at one, the orator yielded to the man, or rather to the woman, and Mr. Gollick went upstairs "to clean himself."

But there was another cause for that gentleman's restlessness,—and even when he reappeared with his somewhat portly person arrayed in a waistcoat got up to perfection, and across which his heavy gold watch-guard hung like a festoon on a bow window, his face shone with a free application of scented soap, but there was a world of disturbed speculation in his eyes.

Five days ago he had heard of the arrival of the new curate, who after having called upon the rector, would, it was supposed, present himself before the churchwardens, or at all events ask them to call on him or meet him at the vestry of the church. Not a word, not a line had anybody—that is, any parochially official body—received, and even the rector, although he knew that Mr. Smith had declined to occupy a room in his house, and had taken lodgings at Miss Truffles', could only inform them that the gentleman would officiate in the pulpit on the

following Sunday week, and was at present supposed to be engaged in settling his own affairs.

Now Mr. Gollick, who naturally thought that a new curate was likely to hold aloof from persons like himself—men of influence and standing in the parish, and with a reputation for local legislation—in consequence of praiseworthy but foolish timidity, had on the previous day been struck with the sudden reflection, that there could be no better method of encouraging a young beginner than by inviting him to the great ceremony which was on the point of consummation, and as there was no time to consult with his brother vestrymen, had ventured to take the duty upon himself, and after some elaborate preparations had written a note with only one imprint of a buttery forefinger, asking Mr. Smith to be good enough to step round to the shop on the following morning, as he had something particular to communicate.

That any curate should have been in Squashleigh on the morning in question and not have guessed to what the communication referred, was scarcely possible; but that a new curate should have been contented to endure a state of uncertainty on the subject till going on half-past eleven, was altogether repugnant to reason.

This much Mr. Gollick was confiding to Mrs. G., who was at the moment engaged in sticking a large amethyst into her husband's frill, when the clock struck the three quarters, and the gentleman in question strode into the shop, and lifting his hat to

the lady included the vestryman in the same salutation.

The calm ease as well as the frank face and the strong active figure of the curate, took Mr. Gollick a little aback, but he summoned the sense of parochial dignity to his aid, and said, "What can I have the pleasure of doing for you, sir?" with an air which said plainly, if you don't know your place you shall see that I know mine. No recognition for a curate who comes only a quarter of an hour before the time.

Mr. Smith did not cower under the serious sarcasm of the poulterer; on the contrary, he looked up with a surprised smile, and said, "Well, that is my question, I think, Mr. Gollick; I had a note from you last night and have called to see what you want me to do. I suppose it has some reference to the grand dinner to-day, but that is very little in my way, unless you particularly wish me to be present."

"Well, sir," replied Mr. Gollick, turning a little red, "I thought you'd, in fact, be glad of the opportunity of meeting some of the leading men in the parish, sir; it wasn't that you was wanted to take a prominence, but more because I thought you might look upon it as doo to you to be present with the Vestry and the Board, as the Rector's not able to come."

"And I'm very much obliged to you for thinking of me," said the curate, holding out his hand, which Mr. Gollick was constrained to take, although some-

how by this time he began to feel as though he had been talking to one of his best customers, "but as my time is at present rather taken up in visiting in the parish, you'll let me off the dinner I'm sure, and I'll look in quietly in the evening to hear the speeches."

Mr. Gollick was indignant, and yet he felt somewhat abashed. A curate and a perfect stranger to take an invitation so coolly, and then "to hear the speeches:"—was he laughing at him? Not a vestige of a smile except that which was habitual to it lurked in Mr. Smith's face.

"Been a-visitin', have you?" said Mr. Gollick, looking uneasily at the clock, "we've rather wondered that you ain't called on any of the vestry nor the parokeyal officers, Mr. What's-o'-name."

"Smith," said the curate; "not a very difficult name to remember."

"I beg your pardon, sir," stammered Mr. Gollick, turning to a still deeper tint, "as I was a-sayin', you haven't given none of us a call."

"Well, you see, I could quite count on seeing you and the rest of the gentlemen to whom I may come for help, when I had some notion of what wanted looking after in the parish, and I've been making a few calls amongst the people, and on some of the ministers of religion in the neighbourhood. I find you've a good many followers of the Romish Church here."

"What, Catholics, Papists you mean? Yes, sir, we have a few; but would you mind walking on to

the Town Hall? Time's nearly up now, if you're going that way," said Mr. Gollick, uneasily.

They had reached the door when the poulterer stopped suddenly, looked up in the curate's face, and laying one shiny fat forefinger on his sleeve, said, solemnly, "There's Papist goin's on in the next subparish, sir; I hope it ain't true what I've heard, that you're a little too high yourself?"

He spoke as though the new curate had been sent to him as a consignment of game.

Mr. Smith looked into his face with such a bright, quick searching glance, that he removed the warning finger from the coat sleeve.

"You know, sir," he said, "there's doings and doctrines that no Evangelical Churchman could stand, or what's to become of the differences that makes us stick to our principles?"

"As to the doctrines I shall do my best to teach you them when I think it necessary," said the curate; "but I've not paid much attention to the differences you mention at present, Mr. Gollick; we've much to do here before they need considering, and our principles will bear acting up to a little before we can be said to stick to them with any very good result. By the by, I had a very long talk with the Roman Catholic priest last night, and he told me a great deal about some of the new people in the neighbourhood just beyond here; they're mostly Irish, I understand."

"You talked to the Popish priest, sir! How could you?"

"How could I? why you'd sell him a turkey, I suppose, if he wanted one, and would let him pay for it, I dare say. He's a very amiable, kind-hearted man, Mr. Gollick, and I wish there were a few more like him in that respect to influence the parish; but the minister at the chapel yonder is one of the right sort of fellows to call upon. I heard of him at Oxford, and was delighted when I found he had expected I should go to see him. I heard more while I was sitting in his study for a couple of hours last night than I should have learnt in a month of anybody else. He seems to know what Squashleigh is like pretty well."

"You'll excuse me, sir," said Mr. Gollick, with rather an alarmed face, "but wasn't there great injudiciousness in you a-callin' on a Dissenter; and not only so, but he ain't half orthodox. You really ought to ha' made some inquiry first among them as know'd."

"Among those who knew what was orthodoxy, do you mean?"

"No, no, not that, but as might ha' warned you; why, God bless your soul and body, I've heard that he says things as is downright profane—don't believe in hell, *he* don't. I always thought that the Church was more against Dissent than they was even against the Papacy; and even the other Dissenters don't hold with him."

"Have you ever heard him preach, Mr. Gollick?"

"Gawd forbid, sir; no more would you, I hope?"

"I heard him last Sunday, and I believe he's as orthodox as you are. But there's another man I don't much like; a big, black-eyed man, who preaches in a little place there beyond the field; he's in some old, or new, or middle-aged connection of Methodists, and whether he'd heard that I was the new curate or not, I can't make out; at all events, when I dropped in at his week-day lecture the other night, he spoke at me pretty freely, and from the tenor of his remarks I am inclined to think that he believes in a hell—for other people, at all events."

Mr. Gollick gasped, and as they had at that moment reached the spot where a sort of procession was formed of the architect and steward, the contractor and senior vestryman, the chairman of the Board, the beadle, the turncock carrying a pick and a silver trowel, and a general following of other officials, he begged to be excused. All eyes were turned on the new curate, who slightly raised his hat to the company, and posted off at a great rate.

The procession had only just started, and the curate had hardly gone a dozen paces, when a private carriage drove up to the hoarding, behind which the great ceremony was to come off; and a young man, rather bronzed by foreign travel, and looking with amused surprise at the preparations, pulled the check-string and looked out of the window. The Lord of the Manor, who had declined with thanks the honour of laying the foundation stone,

had in fact proffered the services of his nephew and heir for the occasion, and the stranger was no other than that gentleman, who had come from London for the purpose, and now awaited the arrival of the authorities. He was in no hurry, evidently, for he had already folded over a newspaper and begun to read, when the eye, which had not quite settled to the print, caught sight of the figure of the curate coming on at full swing; another moment, and he was out of the carriage, and with his arm over the reverend gentleman's shoulder.

"Why, Ril, old boy, what brings you here?" he said, as the curate's grip settled on his hand and squeezed his fingers white; "confound you, let me take my ring off, and then grip as hard as you like. I was at Oxford last week, and heard you'd gone off to a curacy. You'd better have gone in for the bar, old boy, except that you're a deal too good to waste time over it. I'm in chambers now, and bless you the practice my dear old uncle gives me over leases and copyholds, and all the rest of it would make the fortune of a country conveyancer; and in fact they do put a good deal in the way of old Jenkin my clerk, for they're generally referred to him to set right. But where do you come from?"

"Well," said Mr. Smith, laughing, and still shaking his old friend's hands, "I'm just going to my quarters now, over there at Miss Truffles'."

"By Jove! nonsense! you haven't taken to millinery?"

"No, I'm the curate of Saint Barabbas, and I've

taken to furnished lodgings for the present, till my traps come, then I shall settle down with my books and hire a housekeeper of the conventional age."

"I say, Ril, you know what brings me down; come to the dinner, that's a dear old boy."

"Couldn't. I've ever so much to do; I'll look in afterwards, if you'll keep a place for me. See, here comes the parish. Good-bye, old fellow;" and away he went, leaving his old Oxford friend staring after him, and the churchwardens, with Mr. Gollick at their head, staring at them both.

The steward having introduced the heir of the manor to the assembled officials, they were about to proceed to the tent when the plumber, who beside being a vestryman, was a person of some importance as a practical authority on the subject of building and foundation-laying in general, touched the poulterer, with whom he had been in deep conversation, on the elbow, and that gentleman at once sidled up to the new comer, with an anxious expression on his face, which for a moment stopped him outside the tent. "They've forgot something," said a boy, who having scrambled to the top of the hoarding, was conveying intelligence to the crowd outside.

"Here, I can lend you a jack-knife as 'll set the mortar, and then you won't dirty your new trowel," said a grinning horsekeeper, who had perched himself beside the driver of a return hansom.

Mr. Gollick waved his hand in majestic scorn.

"What is it?" asked the young gentleman, who was beginning to laugh.

"The new curate, sir; I see you a-speakin' to him, and would wish to ask whether you think he'll suit?"

"Suit! suit what, and suit how?"

"Suit Saint Barabbas, sir. I was afraid that from what he said this morning he might be too high for us."

"Well, I should think he was too high for most of you, and me too, if you come to that; but he'll never let you feel that; he was at the top of the tree at Oxford, and how he ever came to take such a paltry thing as this curacy is a wonder to me. I'm glad you seem to appreciate him though, for all that."

Mr. Gollick was at sea, but he made a desperate effort. "He's a friend of yours, sir, I see, and no doubt he's vastly clever, and all that, but I ain't clear, nor I don't quite see my way to it, what his doctrine is; it seemed to me that if he wasn't high he was latinooditarian, though I hadn't the least idea that he was a friend of yours."

"Now you look here," said the young man, flushing a little; "if you're a sensible man—as of course, being a vestryman and all that, you are—you'll just let Mr. Smith's doctrines alone, and I dare say he won't trouble you much on the subject of high or low; you *do* as he does and you'll be all right, and then you can listen to what he says till you come round to his opinions. That's what a good many fellows did when he was at college, I can tell you."

Mr. Gollick felt snubbed, but there was some comfort in being reassured by the heir of the manor at all events.

The ceremony was over, and so was the dinner, which had cost (so the editor of the "Combatant" had ascertained) three pound fourteen a-head; or, as "Vindex" said, in a letter on the following Saturday, "as much as would set up a soup kitchen for the relief of the poor who refuse the charity of the guardians, and feed over eight thousand hungry persons with a quart of soup each, at the liberal calculation of twopence three farthings for every quart."

The chairman had just tapped with his knuckles upon the table, the waiter who officiated as toast-master had just tried to give quite a London Tavern emphasis to "*Gentle-men, si-lence faw the Chaor,*" when the curate walked quietly to a seat that had been kept at the head of the table. Such portions of Mr. Gollick's speech as he had been endeavouring to piece together became hopelessly confused again, and when at a subsequent stage of the proceedings he was called upon to propose the toast of "the rate-payers," he had so evidently acted up to the advice of Mrs. Gollick to take a good stiff glass of something and trust to the spur of the moment, that, that spur caused his eloquence to make a sudden bolt and figuratively to throw the orator over its head. It was not till his confusion was drowned in acclamations, amidst which the plumber, who had a harder head, dragged him down by his coat tails,

that he became dimly conscious of having proposed the health of the new curate, in utter forgetfulness of what he had actually been called upon to say.

And yet there was a sort of triumph in it after all, for when everybody had got over their astonishment, the curate's college friend, who was also their most honoured guest, rose with a few hearty words to second the toast, and led off such a cheer, that the people outside responded, although they knew no more why they were shouting than did the poulterer himself, who had already broken all his wine glasses in his enthusiasm.

There was a dead silence for the response to this toast, and yet it was spoken in a few words. Not much about himself, little more about those present, only a passing allusion to the occasion, but a rapid, earnest, telling review of what he had already discovered wanted doing in the parish. It was wonderful how he had learned so much, and one or two owners of house property in the neighbourhood hung their heads to hear what keen eyes had been noting their sanitary shortcomings.

"Where on earth did he learn it all?" said the butcher, who owned a row of rotting tenements in a marshy lane.

"Hush!"

"You will excuse me for having come late, and also for leaving you thus early, for I have an appointment with a man who has done very much towards pointing out many evils that we *must* remedy. Some of the gentlemen present may know

him. He is a shoemaker, or perhaps, to speak more correctly, a shoe-mender, and his name is Richard Yellop."

"Bless my soul and body!" said the plumber, thoroughly roused, "you don't mean to say that you've been listening to what that blackguard infidel Chartist has been a-sayin' of! Why, he's a holdin' forth twice a-week about Church and State, and downin' with property, and Lord knows what. You ought to be ashamed, sir, as a clergyman."

The plumber paused, for from those two bright brown eyes there came a sudden gleam, accompanied with a gesture of the hand, that said "stop," as plainly as if somebody had shouted the word.

"Do you know, or does anybody here know, what first wrought his ruin, and drove him, as he says, from bad to worse, from idleness to drink?"

The plumber tried to brazen it out, but didn't succeed; he had no words, and his looks belied his assumption of indifference. He knew very well who had built a dead wall across the footway that led by a short cut past the cobbler's house; and so, to spite a rival landlord, had cut off the man's customers and his means of living together. He knew, too, that nothing but the cobbler's poverty and recklessness, and his own respectable position at the parochial Board, could have combined to permit so great a wrong.

"I need not enter into that now," said the curate. "I see you *do* know it; but whether or not, he has shown me much that I should know,

and I speak not from what he has said, but from what I have seen. It is to him, and such as him, that I am sent. When I have learnt from them the abuses that concern us all, I will come to you to help me to alter them; and may God make us of one mind."

It was strange, but the earnest sincerity expressed in the young man's every look and gesture seemed somehow to take away the sting from what he had said; and as he sat down, several of the listeners said Amen, as though they had been at church. With a tact which did him credit, Mr. Gollick got up immediately and proposed the toast that properly belonged to him, amidst the applause following which, the last speaker bade his friend good-bye, and went quietly away.

"Please, sir, there's been a person here inquiring for you, and he's to be back in half-an-hour," said the small servant at Miss Truffles', when Mr. Smith knocked at the private door of the circulating library five minutes afterwards.

"Oh, has there? Well, send him up when he calls again; and be good enough to fetch a quart of ale and a clean clay pipe, and bring them upstairs directly."

"Please, sir, I don't think that you think it's the person that it was; it was not a gentleman, sir."

"Why, it wasn't a lady, surely?"

"No, sir, it was a person as lives in the neighbourhood; and I told him I didn't think there was any mending that I knew of."

"All right, Jane; it's Yellop the cobbler, I know. Show him up, and go and get the beer."

The beer arrived before Yellop; and when that renowned leveller and blatant politician found himself on the door-mat, and in answer to a rather uncertain tap, was desired to "come in," he felt inclined to creep quietly downstairs again and go away. As the "come in" was repeated in a louder tone, however, he opened the door, and saw the parson sitting in a loose coat at a little writing-table, around which piles of books, which had just been taken out of boxes, were arranged as well as might be on the floor. It was evident that some of the parson's effects had come from Oxford, for there were two or three quaint carved wood chairs, and a reading-easel, and there was a desk at which he could stand to write; while the room itself was half lighted and half in shadow from a shaded lamp that stood on a bracket.

"Come in, Yellop," said the curate. I'm glad you've returned my visit to the *Senatorium* the other night; though I suppose you won't object to give it a name with some meaning in it after a little talk."

"No, sir, no; leastways, I don't know as I shall keep it open. You was good enough to say that you wanted to see me about something else; is it to have another walk round the parish? if so, it's rather latish."

The cobbler looked thoughtful, and spoke in a lower key than was usual with him, and his eyes

wandered furtively over the strange furniture, and amongst the piles of books lying on the floor.

"Oh no, no; I wanted a little talk with you, that's all. Sit down, there, in that chair; you'll find it a comfortable one. Would you like a little more light? because if you would, I'll take off this shade. Come, draw up to the fire."

The cobbler, who kept his hat in his hand, made a half unconscious motion towards his face, and began mechanically to smooth his hair. He was cleaner than usual, and yet, somehow, he secretly wished that he had washed himself better. He sat down, but only on the very edge of the chair. The parson wheeled his own seat round, and leaned back for a minute, thoughtfully regarding him from the other side of the fire-place.

"So you're going to change the name, eh, Yellop? Well, I'm glad of that. Now, what shall we call it? We'd better agree about the name, because you know our bargain—Mondays for you, and Fridays for me. You understood that, didn't you?"

The cobbler's face relaxed into a grin, in which there was something plaintive and sad, and then his hard, swarthy, black, bristled mouth set into an expression half puzzled, half defiant.

"I don't know what led to it, but such *was* the bargain, if you must have it so; but we've had a sight o' talk since then, and I've changed my views concernin' of keepin' the room open. Not, mind yer, as I give way to you or any man, mark

that; but still, I've thought it over, and at present I ain't made up my mind."

"Of course you won't give way to me; I haven't asked you to do that. We've been about together here and there, and I've learnt something by it; it's no shame to you if you've learnt a little too, is it? Would you like to smoke a pipe, Yellop? I've a clean clay here; and I'm going to have a glass of ale, if you'll join me."

"Well, sir, I've had nothing to-day to drink—and that's a bit strange, too—and I don't feel that a glass of ale would hurt me; but not to smoke here, I—I'd rather not take the liberty;" and the cobbler paused before he put the glass to his lips. "Here's my duty to you, sir," he said.

The parson looked him full in the face and bowed his head without moving an eyelash.

"You owe me no duty, you know, Yellop, that was all done away with when the rights of man were discovered and we entered upon the age of reason; that's your theory, isn't it? Well, I *do* owe you a duty, because I'm a parson, and I don't believe in your theory, and so I say again if you like to smoke a pipe there's the tobacco; and I should suggest that you lean well back in that chair if you want to make yourself comfortable, so that we may talk about two or three little matters that were in dispute the other night."

"Now look here, mister," said the cobbler, upsetting his glass as he rose, and then kneeling down to wipe the ale from the carpet with a ragged cotton

handkerchief; "we've been together, as you say, more than once, a-goin' here and there, and you've preached to me perhaps more'n I've ever heard before—what I've agreed with and what I haven't, that's neither here nor there—but I don't see no call for you to go and rake up what I may ha' said at fust about rights o' man, an equality, an' all that, just to jeer at me. If yer don't want me, say so, an' I'll go."

*another
event*

"Now, just see what an unreasonable fellow you are," replied the curate, without the vestige of a smile, "you commence trying to convince me of our equality by ordering me out of your Senatorium the other night, after I'd paid twopence to come in, and then, when I tried to ask a question or two about what you'd been saying, two of your supporters would have beaten me if I hadn't knocked one of them down. Well, we grow better friends, and I ask you to give me some information about the parish and people, and now I invite you to come and see me to talk over some other matters that have come up while we were going about here and there, and you repudiate equality altogether. I say again, Richard Yellop (and you may see that I'm serious), if you believe in equality light your pipe and let us consider that very question."

"Now, lookee here, Mr. Smith, you ain't one that would take a mean advantage of a man that owns to givin' way; if I thought you was I'm damned——"

"Hold!"

The parson's voice rung out so loud that the very glasses clinked. "No swearing, Yellop; I don't allow it in my rooms. Why don't you light your pipe?"

"'Cause you know da— precious well that it 'ud be a liberty, da— blow it! I wasn't always what I am, but you know well enough that you're a gentleman and a scholar for all you're a parson, and that I ain't; and come, if you must know it"—and here the cobbler sat down again and drew his hand across his eyes—"you've talked to me like a man, and that's better than parson, and gentleman, and scholar, and if you've made me feel that I've still got a man's heart in me, I don't perhaps ought to be ashamed to say as my views is greatly altered, though God knows what they was or what they are."

If this conversation is a little tedious, it may be excused, as showing that the new curate had about him some of that subtle power which comes of earnestness and faith. The talk lasted far into the night, and when the rabid leveller told the parson how his wife had died and left him an only daughter, who, living in neglect and poverty, had fallen into sin, but was now the inmate of an asylum in that very parish, where such as she were kept in a sort of bondage, and yet were fed and cared for, he learned something of the true equality which binds men to each other.

"Look here," said the curate, when he had got up to go; "you say I've done you some good by

the exercise of my calling; now, I want you to do something for me by following yours; you've been a good workman in your time I warrant, and I want a new pair of boots to do all the walking that lies before me in Squashleigh. I advance the money for the materials and you make me a couple of pair while you're about it. Come now, that's a bargain."

Of the work of the next fortnight, little need be said; enough that the new curate became as well known as the postman, and in some cases as troublesome as the tax-collectors. He called on everybody who had any sort of authority, and contrived to learn just what they had made up their minds not to tell him; he got a list of all the little snug peddling charities for which Squashleigh had some reputation; he looked up the directors and managers of private benevolent institutions, supported by subscription and theoretically regulated by lady visitors who were never permitted to exercise the least control at the committee meetings; he dissected the reports of secretaries, who were also treasurers, auditors, and resident governors; he penetrated even to the Refuge, the mysterious establishment where the cobbler's erring daughter was confined in a sort of charitable penal servitude, in bare rooms, behind high walls and barred windows; he studied all the details of the last reports that could be obtained of "the dwelling for Superannuated Saints," "the Retreat for Penitential Sinners;" and many good and well-meaning people, who had, as they thought, laid down a sort of little private footpath to heaven, sighed when they thought

that their property might be taken for improvements and merged in the great highroad.

The next few days were days of hard work for the new curate, and yet his labours began to bear some fruit—or rather, he saw that there was preparation for the sowing of better seed than that which had borne fruit already. Squashleigh was stirred out of its sluggishness, and there were symptoms here and there of some sort of “upheaving of the very foundations of things,” as the plumber remarked to a select circle of admirers at the “Greyhound.” The leaven of the parson’s earnestness and courage began to work. On the Sunday when he was expected in the pulpit, people who had been amongst the most indifferent gave each other a sly nod, and a great congregation assembled to hear some strange expressions of faith. They were disappointed. A plain sermon, but with something about it keen and incisive as well as solemn. Not a doctrine expounded, not a creed explained. The subject, “Personal duties,” the application quite mutual as regarded the duties of pastor and people.

Everybody went away conscious that they had been impressed, and yet scarcely knowing how. In the evening, “Our duties to ourselves.”

But there was one incident sufficient to make this Sunday’s service memorable. Not only did the new curate make no attempt to *intone*, but from some unexplained cause the organist was absent.

Mr. Smith was equal to the occasion. He led the singing himself, in a mellow voice that could be

heard to the remotest corner of the gallery, and when the school children began to squeak out of time, he turned to the organ-loft, and beat the measure of the tune with his hand.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRIAL BY FIRE.

LYING on the confines of Squashleigh was a long straggling village reaching to the edge of the flat open country, and presenting that half-rural, half-dissipated appearance which generally belongs to all such places when they are easily accessible from the Metropolis, and yet are such distant extremities that they miss the true vitality of the great city. There was an old church, tributary to St. Barabbas, two or three schools, a few faded private houses vainly attempting juvenility in dresses of stucco, and such a number of taverns and beershops that the place must either have belonged to the brewers or to one or more of the licensing magistrates.

In one of the lowest of these houses of entertainment, on the very same night as the event occurred which concludes the last chapter, there sat a rough-looking fellow in the coarse dusty dress of a brickmaker. The small tap-room provided for the customers had at the time no other visitor, and as he got up now and then to look impatiently out at

the door into the bar, sat down again and scraped the sand upon the floor into little heaps with his foot, and finally leaned back and begun to swear to himself in a low growling tone, it may be inferred that he was for some reason or other growing impatient. He had just fallen into a doze, when the entrance of a stout-built, bull-necked man, in long boots, and with his rough coat all glistening with the wet, woke him up again with a fresh oath.

"Here's a pretty time to keep a fellow," he said, as the new comer threw off his wet garment and put his head out at the door to order some drink ; "didn't you think as I was tired of waitin' ?"

"Well, I've had to come right across from the river ; and look what a night it is. You could ha' made yourself comfortable here, I s'pose, couldn't yer ?" responded the other. "However, that's not the p'int now I *am* here ; you've found out how the job's to be done, I s'pose ?"

As the job referred to the commission of a burglary, which the two worthies had planned some time before as a relief from the usual occupations of the last comer, who was known amongst his intimate acquaintance as Barley Bill, and was generally engaged either in poaching fish or stealing fowls, dogs, the lead from empty or unfinished houses, and other disposable articles, we need give no further report of their conversation, but bestow a little attention on the house on which the attempt was to be made, and its rather remarkable inmate.

Mr. Ruffey, then—or, as he was usually though

not very respectfully designated, Old Ruffey—lived in a large and rather dilapidated tenement, at the end of a muddy lane leading *from* the High Street of Squashleigh, but leading *to* nowhere, inasmuch as it was closed by a ruinous brick wall overlooking a pond.

The front windows of this mansion (which was detached from the neighbouring houses by a side-way) were always closed, and many of them had been broken by the boys, who regarded the place as one of ill omen, and Old Ruffey himself as a miser; so that the only relief from the dirty brickwork was the yellow painted shutters, upon which the dust and grime of ages seemed to have settled. Whether the windows at the back of the house presented a similar appearance few people knew, for its aspect was concealed by out-buildings, of which no use seemed to be made; and Mr. Ruffey kept so little company that the very few who did know from having seen the inside of his house said nothing about it. How they got in and out was a sort of mystery, for the street door was nailed up; the front steps were piled with paving-stones; the knocker had been padlocked; and the bell was broken. No tradespeople were ever allowed to call, the woman servant doing all the errands herself; and as both she and Mr. Ruffey's niece went in and out by the side-way, it may fairly be concluded that the real entrance to the house lay in that direction.

Old Ruffey himself was never seen to come or go—not that he never went abroad, for he was as

well known in Squashleigh as the beadle himself—but he had some artful way of entering and departing at secret times, so that people who had thought to waylay him, and had for that purpose waited outside his gate for hours, came upon him afterwards in the High Street, mumbling and munching, and shaking his head, as was his habit when he was pleased, which was but seldom.

He was, perhaps, one of the very last men who wore pigtails and hessian boots, and therefore it is scarcely necessary to say that he was a little queerly-shaped old fellow, dressed in rusty black, with a whity-yellow wisp of neckcloth, and such legs as are now seen nowhere but in the comic father characters on the stage. When all his hair dropped off, including the pigtail, he took to a silk cap; and when his hessian boots wore out he fell back on gaiters.

Rumour—confirmed by the few who knew anything of his earlier life—said that he had been a prothonotary; and some knowing people winked when they pronounced the word, and slapping their pockets at the same time, intimated by such pantomime that to be a prothonotary was to occupy a very snug and lucrative position indeed. Those who were so much less knowing that they were unacquainted with what a prothonotary meant, winked also, and slapped *their* pockets, after which both parties usually separated mutually satisfied with themselves and with each other.

Mrs. Ruffey had died while her husband was

still in Doctors' Commons, and had left no children. She had, as it were, slipped off unexpectedly to another world one evening when she was taking her tea by the fire-side, and when he came home he found her sitting with the morning paper folded down at the births, marriages, and deaths, with the last of which she had so suddenly become associated. There were no children, but there was a niece at school, the orphan daughter of a deceased brother of Old Ruffey, who having gone out to India to a judgeship, left his child as a ward to his brother, together with a small sum of money, of which her uncle was made trustee, as having thenceforth the sole control of her future conduct till she came of age.

This was the young lady, now some twenty years old, who came and went in that dull old house, and after whom some of the best intentioned people of Squashleigh looked with a sort of respectful pity as she went to her pew in church on Sunday mornings, or walked daily along the High Street for an hour before dinner, and an hour after tea in summer, or an hour before tea in winter.

She had no acquaintances, except such casual ones as the shopkeepers where she dealt for materials for her needle-work, and Miss Truffles, of the library, who never spoke of her without tears in her eyes—for to Miss Truffles she was a sort of heroine, approaching nearer than any one that lady had ever known to the leading characters in two or three of her favourite novels.

With all this, it is little wonder that Old Ruffey was regarded as a sordid tyrant, and that the pale, quiet, dark-eyed girl, who dressed so plainly and spoke so gently, should have had a good deal of sympathy even in Squashleigh.

Not that she was quite conscious of it, and it may be doubted whether she was absolutely miserable, for Old Ruffey, with all his miserly propensities and his crazy attempts at seclusion, was never actively unkind to her. The interior of the tumble-down old house was tolerably comfortable, and not badly furnished—she had her books, her work, her piano, and the run of the rooms. It was a dull, depressing, almost deadening life for a young woman with the thoughts and hopes common to womankind; but it wore slowly and surely—there was no keen pain, no acute suffering.

At least, there was nothing of the sort until the time of which the present story treats; but just before that period something had happened which changed all the current of the girl's inner life, turned it back upon itself, and with the shock broke up all the even daily routine which she had learned to regard as a part of her existence, without looking to any probable change for the future.

There is little need to say that Old Ruffey's niece was in love, and that she had never suspected the fact until she had learned that somebody—and *that* the right somebody—was in love with her.

The organist at the church of St. Barabbas, Squashleigh, was a young fellow who had only been

chosen to succeed the old professor of Psalmody, because his obvious superiority to half a dozen competitors was held to counterbalance the damaging fact of his having lived all his life in the parish.

When he was a quiet, thoughtful boy, secretly following the art he loved, he had spent many a half holiday in the organ-loft blowing the bellows for the old preceptor, who soon found himself equalled by his pupil, whose school studies were at last almost neglected, until his parents, small shopkeepers of Squashleigh, made the best of it, and instead of apprenticing him to the tailor, spent the premium in lessons from an eminent musician, and made their son happy by the purchase of a piano.

How it came about that Richard Merton should ever have spoken to Harriet Stow, we will leave to those who are acquainted with the operation of subtle influences and psychological affinities to answer. It was natural enough that when the greater part of the congregation had left the church she should remain in her pew listening to the glorious peal of the old organ played with a master's hand, and should feel in that brief half-hour of pure enjoyment lifted altogether above the sordid influences of every-day life. It was natural that the young man meeting her once or twice at the porch so late, and afterwards watching her from the gallery, should play lovingly and tenderly, finding one who was so rapt in appreciation of his art. And so,—and so,—they met, and spoke, and loved, and

suffered the first mutual thrill of that most exquisite torture.

The end of it seemed very hopeless, and yet they met often, and Old Ruffey knew nothing of it till this had been going on for a year or more, and Harriet had come of age. Then he said nothing at first, but coming home one night he heard voices at the gate in the side-way, and waiting there in the dark till one of the talkers came out, let Richard Merton stumble into his arms, where he held him, and clung to him with the tenacity of a cuttlefish, calling out "thieves" and "police," till Harriet came out with a candle, and the lovers explained themselves. Old Ruffey waved Richard away without a word, then went in and told his niece, that if she ever saw that young jackanapes again she should go out of his house without a penny, and might go to law if she liked, for even though she was of age, he had thirteen years' schooling, as well as board, lodging, and clothes, to deduct from the two thousand pounds that her father had left her.

They did meet, however,—met even at that house, where her uncle, who grew blinder and more obstinate, and seedier and rustier, every week he lived, never noticed that the girl grew pale, and looked at him sometimes with scared, anxious eyes;—was restless, listless, eager, indifferent, varying in mood from day to day, and evidently drooped beneath a weighty sorrow or a corroding secret which he would never guess.

Thus matters had been going on for a year, at

the time when our story commences, or rather on the night when the brickmaker and Bill Barley met by agreement behind the dead wall at the edge of the pond, with the intention of breaking into Old Ruffey's house, and sharing the store of plate and other valuables, which they firmly believed were stowed away somewhere in an old-fashioned chest, or within the recesses of a deep closet on the first floor landing, which the brickmaker remembered having seen when he was a boy, and his mother went out charing.

Eleven, twelve, one o'clock, and still there was a glimmering light coming through a chink in the window shutter, though nobody seemed to be stirring in the house.

"I'll tell you what," said Barley Bill, at last, taking out a lantern and peering over the wall, "that there glim 's a-waitin' for the old cove, and we'd best begin work at once, and chance it. Ten to one if he ain't out o' the way, and if he should come in arter us, one on us is enough for him. Here goes!" and he swung himself over the wall and disappeared down the sideways, followed by the brickmaker, and both keeping in the shadow of the house. Had Barley Bill kept his lantern open he would have seen two men crouching down in the fore-court, with their faces close to the broken iron railings as though they were on the look out for somebody not going into but coming out of the house. There were two men there, at all events. One of them was Old Ruffey himself, and the other a Police constable,

for the old man had been in the evening to the Inspector, and stated that he knew of a visit which would be made to his house that night by a thief, a friend of the servant, who must be taken in custody with the stolen property upon him.

How he had learned that Richard Merton would be there that night, only he himself knew; but the organist had managed to convey a note to Harriet to say that he was coming, and that "if she was ready, all had been prepared;" that the contents of this note had come to the knowledge of Old Ruffey was as certain as that he at once hit upon a plan to crush his niece and degrade her lover at the same time.

Before the pair of housebreakers had gone half way to the side door, they heard it closed softly, and two people came towards them, speaking in a low voice; they had only just time to stand close under the wall before the others were close upon them, and at that moment the brickmaker, who was an awkward fellow, contrived to stumble, and fell against one of the advancing passengers, who caught him in a tolerably strong pair of hands, and demanded to know who he was and what he was doing there.

As feet were heard coming up the path, the brickmaker never stopped to answer the question, but wrenching himself away from his assailant, and not even returning a smashing blow that he received just behind the ear, followed Bill Barley, who had just disappeared behind one of the outhouses

beyond the garden wall, and so got away into some patches of waste building land before the policeman had time to turn on his bull's-eye to look after them.

Not that Old Ruffey had given him much opportunity, for that ex-prothonotary no sooner caught a glimpse of Richard, than he began to execute a sort of wild war dance in front of him, shouting, "Here! help! officer! this is the one, never mind the others, I give this villain in custody."

Richard was too much amazed to think of flight, and when the constable came leisurely forward to examine his prisoner he was almost equally surprised.

"Why you don't mean to say that you charge Master Merton with robbing of the house?" he said, gravely. "This is a mistake sure—ly."

"I do, I do charge him, and you will please to take him—off at once, I'll come with you now, now!" screamed the old man, almost beside himself with rage and spite; "charge him I do, and take him you shall, or you shall suffer for it."

And so Richard Merton was locked up, Old Ruffey charging him before the inspector; and that was the reason of there being no organ in the church-service on the Sunday.

But Harriet Stow was not at church that morning. Only two people in Squashleigh knew what had become of her, and they held her peace.

Her guardian went back to his house to find the servant in a fainting fit in the back kitchen; he left

her to come out of it how she could, and went up and down shouting for his niece; then he felt frightened, and his blind rage turned to awful misgiving. He was afraid to go into any room lest he should see her there dead, and every time he screwed up courage to open another door, he stood first gasping at the threshold, the dim chamber-candle that he carried trembling in his hand. Her bed-room last, and still no sign of her, except a dress hanging behind the door, which filled him with a fresh terror, and a pair of little shoes beside the empty bed—shoes which he lifted that he might look at the soles. He scarcely knew why, but he had a vague, horrible fancy that they might have been trodden in blood.

He sat down on the foot of the bed, and wept tears of impotent rage and self-reproach, and unappeased anger.

A little note left sticking on the white pincushion.

She had gone, that was all, thanking him for all he had ever done for her, and leaving her inheritance that he might do with it as he pleased. She could not sacrifice her life to him. She had tried to be dutiful, but the trial had been too hard for her; she had gone never to return except at his request, and as the wife of Richard Merton.

So the old man shut himself up in his house night and day, and sent for his doctor. That doctor's certificate was the means of remanding Richard Merton till his accuser could give evidence against him, and his accuser was still battling with

his rage and selfish fury and remorse till the following Saturday, and had heard no tidings of Harriet. Then he sent for the new curate, who had heard the story from Miss Truffles, who was one of the two people who knew where the girl was hiding, but had told nobody, not even "the parson."

"Only let her come back," said Old Ruffey, after an interview in which he had implored the curate to seek her, "and we'll see what can be done; if she doesn't come now, I don't know what I won't do to that young man, but let her return, and I promise to think the matter over, even to her marrying him. Will you try to find her?"

"I'll inquire about her," said Mr. Smith, as he rose to go, "but I hope it may not be too late to undo the evil you have done;" and he left Old Ruffey's half-penitence to ripen.

This was on Saturday night, and the High Street of Squashleigh was busy with hucksters calling their wares at the edge of the pavement, while above the murmurs of many voices a shout rose now and then, like a singer's voice heard amidst an orchestra all out of tune. There was a great crowd round the butcher's shop, where the gas flared and hissed, making the roadway, in front, quite bright, and one or two vehicles that were out could scarcely make way amidst the throng in the streets.

Suddenly the hum and murmur were hushed; the shouts died away; and there came a silence like that which precedes the outburst of a storm. Then a roar of wheels that seemed to shake the very stones

of the footway; and a great cry as the crowd parted and hustled backward to the pavement, leaving the road clear.

Fire! Fire!

A pair of horses tore along with the engine, on the shining poles and panels of which the lights shone blood-red, and gleamed in the firemen's helmets, the harness buckles, and on the brazen fittings of the hose, as it flashed past.

Mr. Smith changed his brisk walk into a brisker run, and as he ran, called out to know where the fire was. Not a hundred yards off. It had broken out suddenly at the baker's, and the new Town Hall would soon be all ablaze. He was on the spot almost as soon as the engine, and before the firemen had got out the hose, and the turncock had found the plug, had picked out a gang of men from amongst the crowd, and had them ready to pump; he himself with his coat and waistcoat off, and his loins girt with the braces that he had thrown from his shoulders.

The men worked with a will, and took their time from their leader, who sang out a steady measure as he laid himself out to the stroke. The fire was raging at the baker's, and the men of the brigade were devoting their attention to saving the new building, when there was a shout from the crowd that now filled all the street, and stood a heaving mass to watch the progress of the flames that shone with a lurid light upon their white, upturned faces. Two more engines had come up—but they might be

too late—for the house next door to the baker's had caught from behind, and in a front window four children stood screaming for help; while the cries of their mother—the saddler's wife, who had been out to market and left them locked in a bed-room—could be heard above all the uproar of the streets. A hundred people stood between her and the door; when the parson heard that cry and clove through the crowd to the place where she stood.

“Give me the key, quick,” he said, and without waiting for an answer snatched it from her hand—the people parting right and left to let him pass. But there was somebody there before him, for by the time he reached the door, it had been burst open, and Dick Yellop the cobbler was coming down the stairs with a child under each arm, closely followed by the “Poor-rate” with a couple more.

Such a cheer as that which rang out from the crowd had never been heard in Squashleigh within living memory, especially when the cobbler went back and brought out a bird that was hanging in a cage on an upper landing.

There was enough to do, unless half the parish were to be burnt down, and it was wonderful what strange meetings took place under this common danger; how men forgot their past differences for the time at least; and how, in the heat and excitement of a true human interest, old grudges were half forgotten, and men who had been estranged called each other by their Christian names and worked at the pumps, fresh gangs being always

ready to come forward ; the parson sticking to his post and cheering the others on. But still the fire raged, and was only subdued in one place to break out afresh in another. The tax-collectors had all congregated round the Town Hall, whence they had removed the books and accounts relating to the parish money ; they had gone together to help the poor people in a back lane to get their poor sticks of furniture out of harm's way ; and then had been present at the celebration of a treaty of friendship between Dick Yellop and the plumber, who having seen the cobbler come out with the saddler's children, had his heart melted like solder, and swore that it was beautiful, and that he'd order two pair of boots of Richard on Monday morning and make a man of him.

They were all standing in a group now—these collectors—talking together and watching the flames, for they had pretty well tired themselves out, and the parson wouldn't hear of their taking a turn at the pumps.

He had just let another man take to his place for a minute, that he might give himself breathing time, and had come up to speak to them, when there was a fresh commotion at the outer edge of the crowd where it was darkest a moment before, but where some new flame seemed now to have shot a sudden glare. Another moment and Richard Yellop came bursting through, and with a wild cry seized the curate by the arm.

“For God's sake, sir, get somebody to help us,

and come with me. The firemen are all about the Hall, and the Refuge is in flames. Oh, my daughter! my daughter!"

"Gentlemen, will two of you bring the fire-escape round directly, and will the others come with us?" said Mr. Smith. "Quick!"

The crowd had seen the new danger, and had gathered in front of the building known as the "Refuge;" but the front garden was protected by high iron railings, and within these some of the poor girls and women who had been the inmates of the place were standing, half dressed as they had escaped from the dormitories, where some of their companions were still screaming and rushing hither and thither. As the cobbler came up he peered amongst them to discover his daughter, but she was not there. The iron gate had been closed, and he had seized it to force it open, when the great heavy door of the home opened, and, amidst a great cloud of smoke which was now oozing from the upper windows also, the matron was carried down by a man whose hair was all singed, and who staggered blindly out into the air, followed by a fresh troop of trembling girls. The curate caught him as he almost fell across the doorway with his burden. "Are there any more?" he said. "God bless you, old boy! I thought you would be about somewhere; it's my turn now." He had recognized the "heterodox" Dissenter, who now stood panting and choked with smoke.

"I'm afraid there are," he gasped; "but God

help them, the staircase is all on fire, and they are in an upper room. Don't go! Don't go!"

But he spoke to air. The girls had been taken away by the matron to a neighbouring house, and through the open gate the curate sprang into the road, where a fireman had come up with his axe in his hand, but now stood undecided what to do, motioning the fire-escape that was endeavouring almost in vain to make way through the crowd.

At that upper window, amidst the smoke, two women stood and screamed, and wrung their hands.

There was no time to think. The parson snatched the axe out of the fireman's hand, and leaped through the gate again.

"I'm with you," said a deep voice, at his elbow; "you shan't go alone."

"Quick, then, if you must, but hold your head down and don't turn back."

Then they went in, and as he stopped a moment to look around for the cobbler who had disappeared, he saw that his companion was the Methodist who had been so ready to damn him.

There was no time for explanation amidst all that flame and smoke; but they reached the first landing together and took breath; there a new difficulty awaited them; the cobbler lay upon the stairs—senseless; he had tried to get to the room above and the smoke had beaten him.

"Listen!" said the curate, laying an awful grip on his companion's arm; "take him down and let me go alone."

"Stop a moment, then, take this;" and the Methodist tossed him a woollen "comforter" saturated with water; "keep it over your mouth, and the Lord be with you."

"Amen," said the curate, as he leaped through the smoke.

It was well for him that he had taken the woollen wrap, for the staircase higher up was aflame, and he had to spring across it to the room door, which he burst open with his shoulder; his hair and woollen shirt were singed, and he could feel the heat through his boots; but the fire had not yet reached the room to which he was guided by the shrieks of those within. They came clinging to him, but he gently pushed them off, and swinging the axe round with all his strength, hewed away at the iron bars where they were fastened to the wall. A great shout from the crowd without, and then he saw some dark object come up to the top of the sill; it was the fire-escape at last, and as he plied the axe with redoubled vigour, the iron bars gave way just as the head and shoulders of a fireman came above a sort of little parapet below. He drew both the women half-fainting to the window, and bade them stand there a moment, then crawled through, and planting his feet upon this projection, clung with one hand to an iron pipe that stood out a little from the wall, and cut away the two remaining bars, the blows of his axe ringing out above the shouts of the crowd below, who wavered to and fro in the excitement of watching him; every muscle upon his

powerful frame looking gigantic in that lurid light. Another minute, seeming like half an hour to those beneath, and he had helped both women out. One went down the escape alone; it was Dick Yellop's daughter; the other fainted in the fireman's arms, and was carried down. As the curate saw her face for a moment by the flame he almost lost his hold; it was Harriet Stow.

Saw her face by the glare of the fire. Yes; and saw, too, that his own descent by the fire-escape was hopeless. Before the fireman reached the ground with his burden the flames from that lower window had roared out in great forked tongues that had singed the canvas, and now the ladder itself was alight, and as the blaze caught it, began to crackle and splinter.

A low cry like a moan went up from the crowd, succeeding the ringing cheer that had greeted the rescue of the two girls; men shouted to him to wait for a ladder that was now coming; women knelt down in the roadway and prayed, and in answer to it all he waved his hand, and looked upward for some means of escape. The flames were lapping the very coping on which he stood, but there was another projection just above his head, and the fire had not yet caught the roof. First throwing up the axe, he grasped the iron pipe with both his hands, and shook it to test its strength. It held firm, and with a tremendous effort he drew himself up till his arm rested on that upper ledge; even while he hung there the floor of the room below fell in,

and amidst the cry of that great crowd and a volume of smoke and sparks, he knelt upon the roof.

The people saw him gain his feet, and with his hand to his face go slowly but surely along between the ridges of the tiles ; then he disappeared at an angle, and amidst a strange silence a number of men made their way to the back of the building where he might be brought down if only there were the means to reach him.

Such a shout as came from them presently ; such a roar of exultation mingled with the crying of women, and the yells of all the boys of Squash-leigh.

He had got to the back, where the great elm-tree stood, and there had slid down the slope of the roof until he caught its topmost branch, which, yielding with his weight, had yet given him time to scramble from bough to bough, and come crashing down in their very midst. And now they had him, and were carrying him, singed, and scratched, and half-naked, to his home.

"Thank you ! thank you !" he said, a little faintly. "Please put me down. I've broken my arm."

But he waved his sound arm cheerily to the people, who shouted as they made way for him to pass, and supported by the Water-rate and a surgeon, went home to bed.

When the Water-rate joined his fellow-collectors afterwards at the "Greyhound," he reported that the arm was injured but not broken, and that

in spite of his severe exertion, the curate was doing well; had, in fact, gone to sleep from exhaustion.

For the tax-collectors had agreed to meet and refresh themselves when the fire was out; and if ever men required refreshing, they did, for they had been amongst the busiest all that night.

Was it strange that they should each and all of them begin to speak of fires at which they had been present, and so going from one topic to another, relate some of their personal experiences? It was a strange thing to happen in Squashleigh, certainly; but a stranger thing than that happened there; for this fire, which had come upon them so suddenly, seemed to help on the work that the new curate had begun, and to have burnt away a great deal of that moral plague of selfishness and distrust, by rousing men and women to mutual help and to mutual loving-kindness. How this grew and grew until the people seemed to change altogether, and Squashleigh became one united parish under the name of Saint Faith, it would take a volume to tell; but when Cyril Smith appeared in the pulpit on that memorable Sunday morning after the fire, with his hair all cut short and his left hand on his breast, there ran a sob through the congregation that may be said to have been the first pulse in that new life. As to the tax-collectors, their meeting at the "Greyhound" became a weekly one, and was thereafter organized into a social club, where every member had something to tell. What they told during the

first fortnight of their newly-acquired freedom is set forth in the following pages, which the parson himself was asked to edit, but preferred to assign the duty to what he was pleased to call an abler hand.

There was something quite natural in the desire of the collected Rates and Taxes to elect a chairman, and it was no less natural that the "Water-rate," who had borne a conspicuous part in the calamity which had ended so happily, should be called by acclamation to that office.

He was a quiet, ruddy-cheeked, silver-haired old gentleman, to whom to cut off the supply from a defaulter must have given a real pang, and as his clear blue eye beamed over the united company, there was a touch of melancholy in his face that spoke of a life not always free from some heavy sorrow.

"If I understand our agreement, gentlemen," he said, "the experiences we have to relate need not be professional, and therefore I shall ask you to listen to a very simple story of a personal character, in which I was more of an observer than an actor."



THE WATER-RATE.

By W. J. PROWSE.

LIKE TO LIKE.

The Water-rat's Story.

I.—ANTHONY HARDING, HERO-WORSHIPPER.

ANTHONY HARDING, an enthusiastic young English gentleman of twenty-three, had, amongst many ideals or possibly illusions common in that period of life and that kind of person, these two : number one, an ideal of friendship ; number two, an ideal of love. N

He believed, with regard to the first of those, that he had realized it already ; he was certain, with regard to the second, that he had *not*.

There is more hero-worship amongst our young men than we are wont to imagine. They are apt to take their tone from their elders, in itself an act of hero-worship in the wrong direction, and to ape that slang of listless cynicism which, to the shame and sore detriment of the age, is so common amongst us. In their heart of hearts, however, they are glad when they see a better man than themselves, and are only too ready to follow him. Failing any hero, they will even fall back upon a humbug ; on some rickety Rochefoucauld *minus* the epigrams, some tenth-rate Don Juan *minus* Julia, Haidee, and her frolic grace, Fitz Fulke. It is in the nature of all young animals to imitate and admire.

Anthony Harding, luckily for himself, knew a humbug when he saw one, and had a friend who was worth his enthusiasm. To the post of hero, vacated by the discovery that the captain of the Oxford eleven during Anthony's chief cricket year was, in private life, rather a fool than not, succeeded a remarkable soldier, who was a man of honour.

The lad was supposed to be studying for the bar, and in accordance with a weak-minded custom that is still very prevalent, he had chambers in the Temple—chambers as dreary as any inhabited by a full-blown Q.C. But he did not read hard; he had an ample fortune in right of his mother; he was the eldest son of a rich father; and he was merely qualifying himself for horsehair in order that he might have something to do.

Matrimonially, all is fish that comes to the net, especially gold fish, and Anthony had been angled for two or three times. He was a handsome fellow, and looked very unlikely to make a good lawyer as he lounged in the morning on his sofa, petting his Skye terrier, "Rough," a pipe in his mouth, fresh from his tub, six feet of good flesh: as to his cheeks, brown; as to his eyes, blue and bright; as to his upper-lip, lightly moustached; as to his arms, long; as to his shoulders, broad, with a slight stoop; as to his legs, rather of the greyhound build; as to his costume, red smoking-cap, due to a female angler, shooting-coat, no waistcoat, no braces, flannel shirt, and tweed trousers. The tobacco was Cavendish; the pipe was clay.

As to the ornaments of the chamber, there was a clock which had long ceased to go, and there were several portraits indicative of a remarkably inclusive hero-worship. Mr. Tennyson, Abd-el-Kader, Mr. Carlyle, Mr. Sayers, General Garibaldi, Robert Browning, Signor Mazzini, Mr. Thomas Hughes, the Rev. Charles Kingsley, Bob Chambers, Bishop Selwyn of New Zealand, Tom Lockyer, and the late Mr. Robson—all these were amongst the objects of Anthony's idolatry ; and I don't see that his portrait-gallery, oddly assorted though it was, included the likeness of a single humbug. On the whole, it was better than a collection of French prints, or a set of the judges. Whether it was calculated to inspire professional confidence in the bosom of an attorney, I can't state. You see, Tony wasn't "called" as yet.

No lady was represented on his walls.

The Three (female) Fishers had gone sailing away to the West End—away to the West—as the son went down ; and one of them had caught a capitalist, and the other two were still floating, forlornly beautiful, upon the shoals of London. For, when Man won't propose, why, Woman must weep ; and in *their* case, it was "Good-bye to the Bar (as represented by A. Harding, Esquire) and its moaning !"

Anthony had no sisters ; and then, although you must not imagine him to be a bit better than many of his neighbours, he was a great deal too healthy to be thoroughly vicious.

Bad health is very frequently the consequence of vice, no doubt ; but quite as frequently it is the cause.

Thus was Anthony a London loungeur, idling his time, enjoying it, but vaguely restless and dimly anxious for what he would have called—he had not yet passed that period when men think it fine to talk in capital letters—a Purpose and an Object.

And a very pretty Object he found in Miss Caroline Edwards ! But with many apologies for keeping that young lady waiting, I must introduce you first to Anthony's hero-in-chief, whose portrait occupied a place of honour beside those that I have duly catalogued.

II.—ANTHONY HARDING'S HERO.

"Sir," said a clever and genial writer, lately gone to his rest, when addressing one of the *nouveaux riches*, "Sir, I am a poor gentleman, but I am a cadet of the honourable house of Dunbar !"

Ralph Dacre was for a long while a very poor man indeed ; but he too was a cadet of a good house ; and after the exemplary fashion of the English, leaving his eldest brother—he had two older than himself—to the tranquil enjoyment of the family revenue and domain, he had wandered on the earth, at first a merry vagabond, at last a knight-errant of revolution.

In his school days he was a hot Royalist, and like some few other young Englishmen, he foolishly drew sword for Don Carlos, until De Lacy Evans—an honourable soldier, at the head of a dreadful gang of volunteers—took service with the Christinos. Then, refusing to fight against his countrymen, he

came away; but he brought with him from Spain a grand memory. He had known a great man—one of the many “forgotten worthies” of our century—a silent, sallow Spaniard of the Basque provinces, in a slouch hat, who was fond of cigarettes—I beg pardon, *cigaritos*; one who foiled Mina, the *guerillero*, at his own game, and who did all that could be done, by courage, tenacity, and genius, to save a bad and hopeless cause. The name of this man was Zumalacarregui—a name so difficult to spell and to pronounce, that I do not wonder it has remained rather obscure.

Roaming about, seeing many places and people, always using his eyes—which were naturally keen, Ralph crowded a good deal of life into a few years. Terribly fond of fighting, he became involved in some of those South American brawls, in comparison with which the Schleswig-Holstein question was intelligible and plain. But he had also one long, blessed interval of peace. This was in the Marquesas Islands; and he grew so fond of swimming through the surf at Nukaheva, so fond of basking in those lovely island-valleys of the Pacific, that at times he was tempted to stay there for ever. What would it avail him, after all, to go back to Europe? to mix again in its trouble and turmoil? Might it not be better to live out his life in the island, simply a healthy animal, nothing more?

Resisting this ignoble temptation, like an honest Englishman, as he was, he came back; and then occurred a curious change in his character. Fresh

from a country where everybody had enough to eat, if the meal were only of bread-fruit, pauperism horrified him; the inevitable evils of an advanced civilization were, in his eyes, intolerable and iniquitous. In Paris he met with leeches, who had wonderful nostrums for the cure of almost every disease that can by possibility affect the body politic. He was impressionable, emotional; a man not of thought, but of passion and action; easily led by intellects weaker than his own, so that they had but the appearance of a profundity which he did not himself possess.

In the camp of the Republicans—the Republicans before the Republic—he met with many gallant gentlemen and worthy friends. He took his chance on the barricades; had a long term of imprisonment in St. Pélagie; and found, on coming out, that he was a rich man. His stay-at-home brothers both died in the same year; he, rover, Red Republican, reckless adventurer, had only two or three scars on his skin, and was in ruddy health.

If you have money and if you have also Republican principles, you will find that the possession of the latter involves the expenditure of the former. Ralph Dacre dipped rather deeply into his financial chest; but he cared nothing about Homburg or Baden; he was a man of extreme purity, temperance, and simplicity of life; and he preferred campaigning to the pleasures of the city.

I presume that this is a prosaic age; we are perpetually being told so by our public instructors;

but I know that this man, still in his prime when our story opens, had served with Zumalacarregui in Spain, with Schamyl in the Caucasus, with Abd-el-Kader in Africa, with Joseph Bem in Hungary and Transylvania, with Guiseppe Garibaldi on the walls of Rome; and I don't see that any *preux chevalier* of the middle ages could have served under more "chivalric" leaders, or in more "romantic" wars.

When the game was up in Italy, for the time being, and the noblest of modern Italians, hunted like a wolf, had buried his wife in the woods, Ralph Dacre came home. He had lived enough—he needed rest; and he was somewhat soured by the apparent ruin of the cause which he had most at heart. As I said, he was not a logician; but, in a confused way, he had a horror of oppression, and was enamoured of freedom as a lover of his mistress.

For the rest, his English life was very happy. London, after all, has its charms, even for a knight-errant of revolution; and when London palled upon him, he could amuse himself very effectually with his gun and his yacht. A dim idea, also, that, as a Dacre, he was bound to be a "personage," kept him at home. He got over his horror of a black coat and a tall hat; and when you met him in the club smoking-room—a large man, with a scar on his cheek, and a slightly grizzled moustache—you would set him down simply as a quiet and clubable soldier. As for Nukaheva, the Metidja, the Caucasus—you would never have dreamt of *that* part of his life.

The Dacres and the Hardings "knew each other at home," as schoolboys say; and Ralph's heart—which was wonderfully warm for a man of forty-five—had young Anthony in one of its cosiest corners. The lad amused him, to begin with. There was a pleasantly frank dogmatism about the young gentleman, which the old campaigner relished; and when he heard the boy rhapsodize concerning Mr. Tennyson, he thought of his own feelings with regard to the late Lord Byron, and seemed, by an inverse process, to go back through the years until he had almost attained his minority.

To hear Anthony's hearty "By Jove! sir," rolling musically from the chest, was in its way a real pleasure to men who had long adopted the fashion—I am not at all sure that it is a good one, by the by—of being extremely reticent in their utterance of emotion. Tony's splendid capacities for enjoyment, his bright young enthusiasm, the fervour with which he admired, and the intensity with which he despised, were all inexpressibly charming to the soldier. He saw the making of a man in Tony, and helped in the process of manufacture. With *him* he was almost garrulous; and he entered into all his hopes, aspirations, desires, enjoyments, as much as a man of forty-five can with a youngster of twenty-three.

There came a time when Anthony, instead of caring for long rides with Ralph through the pleasant country lanes, took to showing himself in the park—when he began to be rather assiduous in the

process of "dressing"—when he cared less for long yarns about Achulko, Guipuscoa, Paraguay—when he became discreet in the use of tobacco—when he was to be seen in Covent Garden Market of a morning, buying flowers—when he developed a strong taste for the divine art of music as interpreted upon the operatic stage.

We all know what has occurred when these symptoms offer themselves to our notice; and Ralph knew, as quickly as anybody, that Anthony had met with—let us put it mildly, and say a Bright and Beauteous Dream of Joy—in point of fact, a young lady!

What he did *not* know was, that for *him* also Miss Caroline Edwards was lying in wait!

III.—MISS CAROLINE EDWARDS.

It may be quite as well to mention at once that she never committed bigamy, and had not been endowed by nature with yellow hair; also, that she was already twenty-six.

His ideal of friendship satisfied in Ralph Dacre, it remained for Anthony to see whether his ideal of love, which had most decidedly *not* been realized with either or all of the Three Fishers, would be fulfilled by this young lady.

Both in face and figure Caroline sinned a good deal against the ordinary canons of female beauty; and many amiable critics of her own sex would "take her to pieces" almost as coolly as a certain operator was wont to do with the waxen model of a

Venus. These feminine sticklers for orthodoxy in prettiness, however, could not reclaim the men from the pestilent heresy of falling in love with the decried maiden; and the flirt—for she *was* a flirt—had generally half-a-dozen admirers dangling about her.

An oval face, with a gipsyish warmth in the complexion; glossy black hair, banded back and clubbed over the neck; hazel eyes, that contrasted strangely and piquantly with the hair; a Greek nose, rather full in the nostrils, especially when the girl got interested; rather voluptuous lips, and a firm chin—she had all these, so that you have some notion of her faults as perceived by the spinster-critics; but not of her attractions as acknowledged by bachelor-believers. She was tall, with a large bust and a noble waist that wasp-like beauties anathematized, for it was indeed exceedingly unlike their own.

It was not any one special feature that charmed a man; it was the general look, the aggregate expression, the life and meaning of the face, and the swift, copious variety of all these.

When indolent, there was an air of listless disdainful pride about her which irritated you into love and provoked you by its announcement of an obstacle to subdue; but she mastered you altogether if you ever succeeded in interesting her—if her eyes, opening more than usual, met yours, as she looked up and uttered a prettily interrogative little “Yes?”

Her people were in the first generation from the City, and she was therefore a little haughtier in her manner, perhaps, than men like Harding or Dacre, who took their position for granted, as their fathers had done before them for some centuries ; her family was rich—she would be a good match ; and offers were not lacking. She flirted—and refused.

She was a born coquette, but it would be wrong to say she had no heart. Heart ? She had heart enough for a dozen ordinary British maidens—but few men had yet touched it, and a strong hand was needed to play upon it with much effect, to draw forth much melody from its strings, that jarred unmusically in answer to clumsiness or conceit in the player. There was the making of a noble woman in her ; but there were materials also for the manufacture of a very bad one—cynical and cruel, callous and cold.

She moved Anthony first by a rather audacious contempt for some of his idols, of whom she spoke with a cynicism peculiar to the over-educated young ladies of the present day. I say “over-educated,” because the culture which in a man is but the prelude to action, often results, in ladies, in nothing better than a sterile cleverness.

Tony wished to convert her ; it is a common weakness with young men at twenty-three, and generally results in an addition to the Registrar's Return of Marriages, to begin with ! They were thrown a good deal together in society ; she cared little for him, but rather liked him than not ; in

brief, allowed him to believe what he chose—and he chose to believe a good deal.

The boy made love, after the fashion of his age, awkwardly—with a great deal of honest passion, which a weaker woman would have found irresistible—but which, to tell the plain and honest truth, occasionally tired Miss Edwards not a little. After all, his conversation was limited; and it is not what a man has learned from books, it is what he has himself done in the world amongst his fellows which really interests a clever woman. Now, beyond making a good score in a match against Cambridge, Tony had done very little, and Miss Edwards did not particularly care for the noble game of cricket. She was rather proud of his admiration, liked his manly bearing, his good looks, would not have wilfully pained him as a mere pastime; but the warmth of her interest in him never rose beyond this tepid pitch—whilst, on his part, he was at boiling-point already.

In his talk, Dacre figured a good deal; and the girl liked to hear Tony speak on that theme. *Here* at least was a reality; a man who had lived, probably loved—who lived still, and might love again. Whom? Why not Miss Edwards? At any rate to conquer *him*—to bring *him* within the little circle of her admirers—would be a noble sport; and she had the patience of an “old Shekarry” for the “big game.”

And so they met, all three, and saw a good deal of one another.

IV.—THREE STORMY HEARTS IN CALM WEATHER.

The lures, the prettiness, the graces, the *spiritual* affectations which reduced Anthony to a state of hopelessly-enamoured servitude, did not produce a similar effect upon the soldier—possibly because he had met with them before. Caroline was very French, and Ralph Dacre had lived a good deal in Paris.

He loved his friend so thoroughly, and was so anxious for his welfare, that he looked upon this passion as a real danger—to be warded off, in one way or another, cost what it might. He questioned himself jealously—more sternly than ever a judge questioned a criminal at the bar. Was it not a certain selfishness that made him view the lady with dislike, as one who had ousted him from his chief place in Anthony's heart, and made him rank there as number two instead of number one? Was he not angry because their friendship, strong and firm still, was not *quite* what it had been? To these interrogations his heart and his conscience emphatically answered "No!" and it was from pure love for the boy himself that he felt uneasy as to the future.

For—supposing her won, which was not probable—what wife would she make, after all? Not a good one, thought the campaigner; not one who would be a help-meet for Anthony. He saw plainly—for on *this* point his eyes were open enough, though closed on others—that she did not really love him; and Tony's was a nature that stood desperately in

need of affection—needed it as a flower needs summer and the dew.

He pointed this out to Anthony, who heard him at first with a feeling of blank surprise—by and by, with a certain uneasiness, which was not yet distrust but might grow to it.

It was in the pleasantest time of the year that the boy's passion came to its height.

Both men were fond of yachting: Anthony was to sail with Ralph; and the latter, much to his secret irritation, had to admit Miss Edwards and her mother as two of the party. Tony asked him; the mother *nearly* asked him, with views regarding Tony; the young lady herself was an accomplice, though with views perhaps of a different kind; and the honest campaigner had to surrender at discretion with the best grace he could.

And a delightful time most of them had of it!—the boy basking in the sham sunshine of his mistress's looks, the mother taking a true matron's joy in the prospect of a match, the other guests luxuriating after the manner of our people on the sea. But, more and more, Caroline grew weary in her heart of her somewhat insipid adorer; whilst it was impossible to see much of Ralph without falling under the peculiar spell of his manner and character. He was so unlike the idlers she had known—was so free from their petty vanities—had lived and seen so much—that, day by day, as her deeper nature grew, as she became sincerer, she was drawn towards him, as irresistibly as a moth towards a light, and as blindly.

And *he*? His exceeding modesty hindered him from perceiving all this, but he saw enough to be sure that her regard for Anthony was of the lightest.

A real trouble came upon him; he could not see his friend make shipwreck so utterly just as he entered on the voyage of life; but his own duty in the matter was not clear to him. Pacing the deck at night, with a heavy monotonous tramp, he got no counsel or comfort from tobacco or the stars; and he woke in the morning with the old uneasiness at his heart, to see Anthony blushing like a school-girl if he had but to hand the lady her parasol.

She didn't care for Anthony, *that* at least was plain enough; did she care for anybody else? He couldn't think it. He became unfair to her. She was bad enough; but she was not so bad as he fancied her. He felt that it was hopeless to try to preach Anthony out of his dream; indeed, his few timid tentatives in that line were received with such marked disfavour that he did not deem it prudent to renew them; and, on the whole, he found that the only way to make Tony believe that she was unworthy of him was to *prove* her so.

It was with a feeling of much bitterness and disgust that he deliberately set himself to his task, which, after all, seemed rather a treacherous way of showing his friendship. He reasoned that he could, to put it vulgarly, "cut Tony out"—and he resolved to do it, not by any means with the view of winning the girl for himself, but simply to convince his friend that she was light and unstable.

As he smoked his pipe at night, and meditated on his plan, he was often stung by a sudden sense of pain. He knew that he was about to play with a couple of souls, and he didn't like the game. Whatever Caroline's faults might be, it was scarcely fair for him to woo her; and he had his misgivings as to the manner in which Tony might stand the shock. As the honest boy talked to him with the fervid loquacity of a young lover, Ralph felt rather ashamed of his purpose; but no other way seemed open.

The plain fisher-folks out at sea, who watched the yacht pleasantly sailing along, perhaps envied the "gentlefolks who had nothing to do, and no troubles." "No troubles?" Well, they might envy Tony with some reason, though even on *him* the clouds were darkening; but "no troubles?" It is hard work to catch herrings, but there are worse employments! They need not have envied, for all their poverty and toil, the girl who turned restlessly in bed, her black hair hanging loosely round her, her large eyes open and burning with a strange fire; they need not have envied the soldier as he paced to and fro, too restless to go below, and struggling with a hundred thoughts, fears, and anxieties.

He opened the campaign, nevertheless, and found that the enemy was only too ready to capitulate. She gave up her whole heart to him; her eyes followed him wherever he moved; and brightened the instant that he turned towards her. Very

little love-making was needed; just a shade more ardour in his ordinary politeness and the thing was done. How she triumphed, this girl, when she thought that she had won him! What a love it was to win! To have *him* by her side always; to be bucklered against the whole world by his broad breast; to hear men praise him as he passed; to see women fix their eyes on him, envying her; nay, to urge him on; to make him crown his youth of adventure by a ripe manhood of achievement—as the thought of all this thrilled through her, she blossomed out from a pretty coquette into a glorious woman.

With the light of love in her eyes, with the flush of love on her cheeks, she grew so radiantly beautiful that Anthony felt she must either be his or he must die.

And Ralph Dacre found that this playing with souls was already a dangerous game; that, trying to prove this woman's worthlessness, he had centupled her worth; and that *now* she only lived for him and by him.

Pygmalion, he had warmed his statue into life, though only by simulated love; was he to shatter his workmanship and destroy the splendid vitality he had given?

It was a time of much trial for the old campaigner!

V.—AN EXPLOSION.

The cruise was over. In a pretty little place in the West of England most of the party settled down

to pass a quiet month before the men were summoned northward by the grouse.

N There were a good many respirators about, for the town was in high flavour with fashionable physicians, and the wearer of one of these respirators was a pretty little girl of nineteen, known to Ralph Dacre, and called Lucy Coplestone. It was a sad sight to see her wheeled along in her invalid chair, with her mother by her side, dressed in deep mourning for the father, whose last hours had been clouded by the thought of Lucy's illness; a sad sight, and one that moved the pity of all our three; and when Lucy's face began to brighten up as she heard the merry ring of Tony's voice, the soldier would have given ten years of his life to see the girl well, and Tony's wife!

But the ring of that voice was not so merry after a week or two. The boy saw a change in the manner of Caroline; her languor had disappeared; but the poor youth owned to himself that *he* was not the magician who had chased it away. It was his first great sorrow when he came to believe that his friend, his hero, had treacherously supplanted him. When the thought first struck him, he repelled it—crushed it down as miserably unworthy of them both; but it rose again, it came back. Gallantly he tried for awhile to frame excuses for Ralph Dacre. *She* was so beautiful, so perfect, that it was only natural he should love her; a man of his stamp could not have helped doing so; and yet—and yet—Tony felt that *he* would rather have cut off his own right

hand than so have robbed a friend of his mistress. It was a mean, a dastardly thing ; it was a shame and a sin ; and all the world was a lie, and there was no truth in woman, and no faith in man. . . . Could he win her back ? Could he pit himself against Dacre with a hope of victory ? The honest fellow felt that he had no chance ; that he, with his boyish, beardless face, his ignorance of the world, was no match for such a man in the contest where the hand of an ambitious woman was the prize.

Ambitious ? Yes, he thought, *that* was it. She saw how people deferred to Dacre ; how, without any visible effort on his part, he gave the tone and was recognized as master in whatever society he moved ; was it not natural that she should love him ? Nay, was it not even inevitable ? He had been a fool to introduce them ; and yet, he could not help feeling that his friend should have been honest and loyal.

It is a horrible thing when the whole of a young man's life seems to go bankrupt at once, as Anthony's did. He was hit to the heart. A couple of months ago, how bright was his outlook, with such a woman to win and such a friend to rejoice in his happiness ; and *now*—well, what was there left to live for ? The hope of a wife ? He could never meet with one whom he should love as he had loved *her*. The hope of a friend ? He could never meet with one whom he should love as he had loved *him*.

Miserable as was Tony, Dacre was not much happier ; and at times he could almost have found it in his heart to run away. For mark

this : that he didn't love her, even yet ; couldn't in fact. Had she not cost him his dearest friend already ? There had been no open quarrel between them, but he saw that Anthony was changed ; he saw also—and this cut him to the quick—that the lad not merely hated him as a rival, but despised him as a traitor. The *dénoûment* of the little drama did not seem likely to be that which he had planned. He had endeavoured almost to play the part of Providence ; but there were moments when he felt uncommonly like a sneak ! And then, as to running away, why, whatever the girl might have been before he knew her, she was what she was *now* simply through his handiwork ; and after having played with her heart in his own mere wisdom, he had no right to skulk off as soon as the game grew dangerous.

The atmosphere, you see, was getting very lurid, and it could not be long before the storm would burst.

Lucy Coplestone and all other invalids had gone to their rest early one night at the beginning of August. It was a singularly calm and beautiful night ; the moon was nearly at the full ; the lights of the little town trembled on the waters in the bay ; and there was a great stillness in the air. Anthony was at Mr. Edwards' house ; Ralph had not yet returned from fishing, though they could already see his boat as she rounded the headland, and came lazily along over the smooth, oily swell, leaving a bright track behind her, like the slimy

trail of a serpent, thought Anthony. The old look was strong on Caroline that night, and there was a sadness in it that was less painful for the boy to see than the flush which so often suffused her face as she met Ralph. And at last, as all the old love stirred in his heart, and his yearning grew so great that he must needs speak, he stammered out—you fancy what—wild passionate incoherences, despairing and yet imploring, forlorn and yet almost imperious, as though he would even *make* this woman love him in her own despite! And she—for by this time she had learned what it was to love, to desire, and to be slighted—felt an awful pang of pity for the poor boy who was babbling his whole heart out at her knees; and her hot tears fell upon his upturned face, and for one divine moment of delirium he mistook their meaning, did not know that they were tears of pity, and clasped her almost brutally in his arms. He felt his brain burn madly with joy. She put aside his hands, not angrily—she was past *that* now—but very, very gravely; and then with a grand courage, for in the great silence she could hear the two hearts beating like one, and his breath was still hot upon her cheeks, she told him the whole truth. She heard a footstep on the gravel of the garden-path.

As she spoke, there was a shadow in the room from the open window, as Ralph paused to say good night; “Curse you!” cried the boy, rushing forth, and menacing him with his clenched fist, as he dashed away; and with the sound of that curse

came the cry of a woman, as Caroline fell senseless on the floor. . . .

She looked up, waking, into Ralph's face ; and, as she knew it, and the sense of her misery came back, gave a low, pitiful wail ; " Pardon, pardon ! You don't know—you can't know—it was my love that——"

Cruelly he answered : " Your love has cost me the one friend——" but there broke down, and could only say, " You have driven him mad."

And at that cowardly speech the woman, braver than the soldier, turned upon him, fiercely at bay. "*Him ? What do I care for him ? What wrong have I done to you ?*"

It was a singularly calm and beautiful night ; the moon was nearly at the full ; the lights of the little town trembled on the waters in the bay ; and there was a great stillness in the air.

VI.—AFTER THE STORM.

It would have been extremely romantic if Anthony had forthwith proceeded to the nearest cliff, and flung himself over, making an end of his troubles with one splash in the water. But he did not. He wandered by the cliffs, indeed, scarcely knowing whither he strayed ; for there was a dumb pain in him that seemed to beat against his brain as a blind wild beast in extreme agony might fling itself against the bars of its cage. The singular beauty of the night was not unfelt by him ; and even in this time of supreme misery, he was interested

vaguely in the veriest trifles, and listened with a strange sense of pleasure to the faint halloo that was heard now and then from the harbour, as a fishing-boat, furling her sail, came slowly in round the little pier, and was obscured by its shadow. Or, watching the houses on the hill, he wondered who it was that sat so late yonder where the light still gleamed from the window; and for nearly an hour he went the rounds with a coast-guardsman, smoking and quietly listening to his stories of service in China and the North. Anything was welcome that kept off, for a time, the sense of his misery, the remembrance of his utter wreck.

At length, when the night was waning, he set forth on a longer walk, and pushed steadily along the main-road instead of rambling aimlessly amongst the paths by the sea. Through a couple of villages he passed, where there was not a soul to be seen; and he noticed with how pure a lustre the moon seemed to clothe them in their sleep, shining down upon a little steeple and upon the thatched roofs; and caught himself pausing on the little wooden bridge, to listen to the brawling of the stream that came running down noisily amongst the boulders, from the moorland to the sea. These things he could feel and think about; his own sorrow he could only dimly understand—could not so control his faculties as to think about it with any concentration or set purpose.

By daybreak he was in the town he sought to reach; and still unwashed and unshaven he started

by the first train to London. The noise of the journey, the horrible rattle and roar of the wheels, nearly drove him mad. He went to his chambers, which never before seemed so desolate; he tore down the portrait of Ralph Dacre, and crushed it under his heel, and then, exhausted and faint, sank back upon the sofa.

It was night when he woke. He made ready to go out. He had scarcely tasted food that day. He went to a late supper-house, but the very first morsel that he touched seemed to choke him. He swallowed a glass of brandy instead—and then another.

As the drink revived him, he thought of the little place in the West, and figured the two, arm-in-arm, looking out upon the sea. There was a different night in store for him!

And day after day passed. Now and then he tried to arrest himself on the fatal path that he had chosen; but in vain. Truly, his efforts were not very earnest. The poor boy's nature was crushed; he had been wounded, mortally as he thought, where he could least bear pain; and the penalty that attached to becoming sober was that his memory returned.

To such a course there could only be one result. Strong as he was, he broke down at last, after a fortnight that would have killed nine men out of ten.

For many days he had not been to his chambers, whither Ralph Dacre had proceeded more than once, feeling that to be his duty for the present;

he had slept in low dens and in infamous company ; but one evening a strange shudder passed through him, and with a sudden sense of fear he rose and walked nervously homeward. It was with difficulty that he could get so far. The noise of the cabs seemed to terrify him : he would wait at a crossing for minutes, afraid to proceed, and then dart across the street with a rush, continuing his speed even after he had reached the other side ; and then, again, pausing idly in front of a glaring gin-shop till a woman pushed him, passing by, and roused him from a stupor which was yet alive with pain.

It had come—the penalty for his excess. That night he was down upon his bed, raving in delirium tremens ; and Rough, his one nurse and watcher, crouched beside the bed, and gave from time to time a long melancholy howl that seemed to the sick man like the yell of a thousand fiends.

There was brandy on a chair beside the bed, and he kept pouring fresh fuel on the fire that raged within him.

That magnificent constitution of his still kept up the battle ; he got so far over the fit as to crawl out of bed, to mix water with the brandy for the first time, and to eat a few biscuits. But in the afternoon he was worse ; and he was senseless when Ralph, again calling, heard a moaning in the room and forced his way in.

There was only a solitary candle burning in the place, and the long wick was drooping. The dog flew at Ralph and worried him fiercely before he

knew his voice. It was a strange welcome from old Rough.

The boy's eyes were wide open, and he was talking volubly, evidently unconscious of his state, for he laughed often, and it was only at intervals that he cowered and shivered in the corner of the bed and twitched the clothes nervously towards him.

Ralph had seen a good many horrors in his time, but he had never seen anything much worse than this; and as he stepped towards the sufferer his foot caught in something on the floor. He stooped down to examine it—Rough, still distrustful, growling angrily the while—and found that it was his own portrait which Tony had trampled under foot.

He tended the boy as well as he could, bathed his temples in water, tied a towel round his head; and for all these services Tony smiled his thanks, but still recognized him not, and went on garrulously as before.

So far as his story had any coherence at all, it treated of the man who now sat beside him.

“Yes, by Jove! sir; and he met the same Frenchman—with whom he had quarrelled on the barricade, you know—met him in Algeria—but they never got near to each other, and he thought, old Ralph, you know, that they would never be able to fight it fairly out; and then at last he saw him again—’49 it was—siege of Rome, you know—awful work, for the fellows got close to each other on the walls—Ralph was with Medici and some other splendid chaps, and up comes my Frenchman as

gaily as if he were going to a ball, you know—saw each other at once, they did, and whilst their fellows were hot at it, crossed swords—and old Ralph, he twisted the Frenchman's sword clean out of his hand—and then, sir, by Jove—it wasn't fair you know, but he says he couldn't help it, for the Frenchman hit at him, and the counter *would* come! he knocked him clean out of time, sir, and gripped him round the body and was back on the wall again in a second, whilst Medici stared at him as if he had gone mad, and the Zouaves were swearing at him like a gang of tiger-cats. By Jove, sir, I should like to have seen old Ralph hit out."

The boy clenched his fist, smilingly, and would have thrust forth his arm from the shoulder; but it was heavy, heavy as lead, and it fell again to his side, whilst the trembling feverish fingers also relaxed, and went idly twitching at the blankets as before.

"Best of it all was that they *did* have it out, in Rome—and precious Garibaldi swore when he heard of it, by Jove!—and old Ralph again disarmed him, and *didn't* kill him—found him no end of a nice fellow, with a jolly old mother living at Angoulême, and they got to be the best friends in the world. Ah, you should know old Ralph! Why, sir, when he was riding one day . . ."

And so on, and so on, and so on.

It was the saddest day of all Ralph Dacre's life, and the maddest of Anthony's; for Dacre summoned the doctor, summoned also Tony's father, told him

the whole truth, and found to his infinite comfort that his old comrade did not bear harshly upon him ; and then, when the boy was safe, went down again to the village in the West—cured, one would fancy, of trying to play Providence !

VII.—CLEARING UP.

He went, after all, only from one sick-room to another.

The crisis which had crushed Anthony had only stimulated Caroline into a fretful, impatient anxiety for work. She must *do* something, or go mad. A very sweet and gentle comforter she found in Lucy Coplestone, whose health was mending, though still very frail. If she outlived the winter, so the doctor said, she might recover altogether.

Lucy was a pious girl, and one whose piety took the form, not of morbid self-analysis, but of a generous zeal to do good ; and the proud Caroline saw very quickly that, so far from life being empty and a show, there was plenty of real work close at hand, only waiting for the labourers. To and fro in the narrow streets of the old place she wandered, always on some errand of charity ; and when in this ill-drained village, after a summer of intense heat, the fever showed itself, this girl was amongst the bravest of those ladies—angelic aides-de-camp, so to speak—who, under the direction of two or three brave and thoughtful men, assisted in the battle with disease, and carried comfort to those who were stricken down.

In that fair service, also, Ralph Dacre, be sure, was a volunteer; and though he was sad enough when alone, yet he had the art to be cheerful with the girls; the sound of his hearty voice, breathing its manly encouragements, was as sweet in its way as that of the Sisters of Charity who spoke of consolation; and both were as valuable as any drugs.

And when Caroline herself succumbed, and yet was patient, and brave, and calm, at last he loved her; and she knew it, and grew well. But, by a tacit understanding honourable to them both, not a word was said of marriage whilst Ralph and Anthony were still unreconciled.

Happily had the time passed in London, both for father and son, as Tony recovered. The old passion, somehow, was not so strong when he got better; he recollected all Ralph's earlier warnings, and now, judging them calmly, confessed that his ideal love had been but a delusion; but found, in that fact, no excuse for his friend, whose real motive he never even dreamt of. So fiercely did he still recall Dacre's supposed treachery, that his father ceased to discuss the subject, and waited for time to heal the wound.

Strong and well, Tony resumed his reading, much to the resentment of Rough, who had been exceptionally indulged during the illness, and who was now wont to make a rush at Blackstone's Commentaries whenever Tony addressed himself to the study of that learned writer, and in default of worrying the volume, which he much desired to do,

to bark at it as though it were the great-grandfather of all inimical Tom cats.

The grand time which did so much for all England did as much for young Tony as any. The moment a cloud of war arose in the East, he kicked Blackstone aside—to the infinite delight of Rough, who had a magnificent ten minutes with that commentator—went down to his father's place, and was soon gazetted.

On the night that his regiment received its marching orders—months afterwards, for we didn't go to war in a hurry—he felt in perfect peace and charity with all men, save and except Russians and Ralph Dacre. That evening his father, who had also heard the great news, came to his quarters, and it was inevitable that, at such a time, they should speak much of Ralph.

Said Tony: "Mind you, I only blame him for not telling me at once. He is better than I am, ever so much stronger, and I'd have borne it in the best way I could, and gone away. What I complain of is that he wasn't frank; I didn't blame him for loving Carry—Miss Edwards, I mean."

When "Oh, my boy, my boy," cries papa, "and you are still goose enough to think that he *did* love her? Don't you know, even yet, you absurd Tony, you, that the one thought in Ralph Dacre's grand heart was how to save *you*? how to prove to you that, whatever good gifts the girl might have, she was not the wife for *you*? that to do this he perilled even his own honour—for *you*?"

Then it all burst in upon him, like a storm of sunshine, and he was not a bit too old or too young to cry like a man; and his father, also, had a slightly choking sensation in the region of the throat.

After a long pause, said Tony: "I wish to heaven I hadn't smashed his picture! I tell you what, sir, by Jove, I'll write to him to-night!"

"I think it is the least you can do, my boy," said papa, with a smile.

VIII.—A LETTER.

Anthony was in the trenches when he heard of their marriage, in a long letter from Ralph. He had a twinge, perhaps, as he heard the news; but it wasn't a severe one if he had; for as he walked back, smoking his pipe, to his hut through the snow and darkness, the chief female figure that was visible to his imagination was not that of Caroline Dacre, but the one briefly sketched as follows by his correspondent:—

"Lucy Coplestone adds her good wishes to curs. She got capitally through the last winter, is now quite strong again, and as fond of croquet and archery as any young lady in the county, where, as you remember, they are all fond of archery and croquet."

IX.—IN THE GARDEN BY THE SEA.

The Crimean War is a matter of history; De Bazancourt and William Russell have already

written; Todleben and Kinglake are about to write.

In the old west-country village, there is a garden-group which we are not sorry to gaze at.

There is a stately gentleman of middle age, with as stately a lady, much younger than himself. Beside them, looking also out to sea where the last splendours of the sunset are dying away, is a tall and tawny swell, and his arm is round the neck of a little flaxen-haired lady, who laughs with a pleasant laughter as a rather fat and remarkably wheezy old Skye-terrier, answering to the name of "Rough," interrupts their meditations by a confidential, not to say an egotistical and conceited bark, and worries Captain Harding's boots. He was a Crimean veteran himself, was Rough!

It is almost supper-time, and all good young people are, of course, in bed; but if you peeped over the fence in the morning you would see a splendid boy—black-haired, erect of bearing, ready of speech—holding up a golden-curled young rascal, whilst the inevitable Rough described mathematical problems round them in the grass. Bravo, Master Anthony Harding Dacre, and bravo, Master Ralph Dacre Harding!

Yes, the garden scene is still prettier in the morning; but, meanwhile, it is a singularly calm and beautiful night; the moon is nearly at the full; the lights of the little town are trembling on the waters in the bay, and there is a great stillness in the air.

THE DOG-TAX.

By TOM HOOD.

THE TRUE STORY OF CÆSAR AND BRUTUS.

CHAPTER I.

THE DOCTOR'S DOG.

" You don't happen to want a dog, I suppose ? "

" Well, I don't know that I do."

" Because if you do, there's the article."

The first speaker was Dr. Valentine, the chief medical practitioner in Muddlesfield, a large manufacturing town. The person he addressed was the Reverend Meyrick Mountford, the curate of Beechworth. The animal about which he spoke—but no! he is worthy of a fresh paragraph, not to say two.

The doctor was mounting his horse at the gate of his stable-yard. The curate was passing on his road to visit a former parishioner of his, now resident at Muddlesfield. The dog was sitting in the sun outside a kennel. It was a large kennel—a very large kennel for a dog of his size. In fact it was not *his* kennel. You will observe that I was careful to use the indefinite article. I said distinctly, " outside *a* kennel," and I will tell you why. We are apt to measure a man's greatness by the size of his

residence. I myself tower somewhere about six feet, more or less, but when I see a very little man indeed coming out of one of those big houses in some of those "gardens" in Kensington—which are so-called because they have not a square foot of mould belonging to them, back or front—and when I see that he comes out of one of those big houses with the air of a man to whom that house belongs, by lease or otherwise, I must confess I feel considerable awe for him, and cannot help looking on him as a great man. Which he probably either is or is not, but that does not affect my assertion, that we judge a man's greatness by the size of his residence.

I may be told, probably shall be told—critics I believe do not average more than four foot five and three quarters (I have a bad memory for figures, but I'm sure of the three quarters)—that this is a sneer. But it is not. I am only anxious that my readers should not imagine from the extent of the kennel in question, which, to be precise, was about the size of a sugar barrel, that Brutus, the dog who was lying in the sun before it, was its rightful owner, and a great dog in his way.

He was a representative dog certainly. He would have suited, supposing the franchise were extended to the canine population, almost any constituency; for every individual dog in the largest borough could have found some point common to himself and Brutus.

Not to put it too finely, Brutus was a mongrel. He had the head of a bull, the hair of a skye, the

legs of a turnspit, the tail of a spaniel, the body of a Dandie Dinmont, and the colour of that celebrated dog at the French *restaurant*, who had to be sent to the wash every week with the tablecloths, because he was very friendly, and all the customers wiped their fingers on him, no napkins being supplied. That colour I take it was about the colour of the kitchen jack-towel, when it is taken off the roller at the end of the week—a decided neutral tint.

But how, you will ask, did Dr. Valentine become possessed of such a cur?

Dr. Valentine was the very best judge of a dog in the whole county. Indeed, for horseflesh or dogflesh there was no such knowing customer as the Doctor in the whole country-side. Don't you know the sort of man he was? The terror of all the neighbourhood of the hospital he elected "to walk," but yet an ardent student, as a young man; he became, when he settled down at Muddlesfield, the most popular medico in the district, working off his superfluous vitality in field sports, instead of experimenting on the forces of the lever, as applied to door-knockers, or demonstrating the power of metal as a conductor of sound, by pulling off bell-handles. He knew every point of a horse, and the most audacious "chanter" in the neighbourhood never attempted to pass a screw off on him. And as for dogs, Whacky Stinger, the great local authority on matters canine, until the Doctor appeared, died—in Swaffham jail, where he was waiting his trial for some little affair connected with pheasants, and

rather damaged keepers—all the happier because he felt that his mantle, if I may so describe a velveteen jacket with a great many pockets and with brass buttons representing sporting objects, descended upon worthy shoulders. I don't want to be sentimental, but I may mention that Whacky Stinger, whose only intimate acquaintance with the Doctor was one of five minutes' duration, when the latter thrashed him for ill-using a donkey, left him a legacy, which in Whacky's eyes was a considerable one. It was, indeed, all he had to leave. It was a bull-terrier called, "Lady"—a splendid animal! The only thing I can compare her to is a machine of polished steel in a velvet skin. It was a treat to see her bound along by her master's side, every muscle and sinew working under her coat like the beams and bands of a steam-engine. The Doctor had to part with her, eventually, but not without considerable reluctance. The fact was, she *would* slip out at night and join her master's old companions—who must have respected Whacky's last wishes, or they would have stolen her. She used to come home fagged out early next morning, sometimes with a shot corn or two in her flanks. And she knew a net at a glance, and would follow the Doctor into the garden, when he was going to cover the fruit-trees, with every expression of delight, as if she was glad to think he had at last discovered the object of life was catching hares. He had to part with her for fear of scandal, for she was a poacher born and bred. I only mentioned the incident

about Lady to show you that the Doctor was a judge of dogs.

"But how," I once more hear you ask, "did Dr. Valentine, being such a judge of dogs, become possessed of such a cur as Brutus?"

If you will only give me time I will explain. The Doctor had a large black Newfoundland dog, whom he had brought with him from London, and who was his chief favourite and closest friend of all the four-footed creatures canine in his stable-yard. This dog, for no better reason than that other people had called their dogs so, he named Cæsar. And Cæsar was a noble animal, which Brutus was not, though called Brutus for an excellent reason.

At the end of the Doctor's garden was a field, and at the bottom of the field was a pond. In this pond Cæsar was wont to take his daily bath, for he tubbed as regularly as a Christian. One evening as the Doctor was smoking his pipe under his mulberry while Cæsar was mumbling a very dry old bone indeed, as if, in fact, he were cutting the teeth of his memory on the recollection of a past feast, there came a handful of boys to the pond, some half dozen or so, evidently intent on some aquatic sport. The Doctor lazily wondered to himself what their object was. It was hardly the time for fishing, though, to be sure, there is no close season for stickleback as there is for salmon. Perhaps they were going to swim a boat. There was no wind up, which was a fact adverse to one's general ideas of sailing; but then as they didn't want their boat, as a rule, to go

out of the reach of their sticks, and least of all wished them to be blown across to the opposite side of the pond, which was in farmer Bagley's pasture, where the bull was, that might not matter. Or they might be going to bathe: an amusement which in this case would not entail a notion of cleanliness which is a fatal objection with boys. The pond was a stagnant one, very inky, and inhabited by very lively and tenacious leeches, all of which were reasons why the boys should bathe with additional zeal. So thought the Doctor to himself, idly exco-gitating, as he puffed out blue rings of smoke that rose quietly among the broad green leaves of the mulberry over his head, making the caterpillars unwell, and rousing one spider in particular, who was just in the way to get the biggest share of the smoke, into a paroxysm of fury, so that he shook his web furiously as if he were shaking a carpet.

So thought the Doctor, I repeat. But so did not think Cæsar. When first he heard the noise of the boys he connected it at once with the notion of annoyance, so he muttered a subdued grumble and stuck the tighter to his bone as much as to say, "they shan't get that." But presently, as the boys lingered round the pond, he cocked one ear in their direction, still keeping memory's coral in his mouth. But his attention was rapidly being weaned from the bone. He looked out of the corner of his eye a little while—then lifted his head, letting the gnawed relic fall unnoticed on the grass. Then he sat up, and putting his head on one side, looked very long

and earnestly towards the urchins. At last he got up and taking a long contemplative stretch—with his eyes still fixed in the same direction—he walked to the edge of the terrace, where a sunk fence divided the garden from the field. But once there, he did not stop long. He said, “By Jove!” and in another minute was bounding down the meadow.

At this portion of my story an incredulous reader gives a whistle.

Well, sir, what is it?

“Why, you know—come, I say—hang it all, a dog can’t say, ‘By Jove!’ it’s quite ridiculous, you know.”

All I can say, sir, in reply to your statement is that if you never heard a dog say “By Jove!” you have not been in the habit of associating with the nobler animal. I have a dog at this present moment who is an accomplished conversationalist, and who, if she does not say “By Jove,” because it would not be ladylike, speaks English excellently, though with a slight Pomeranian accent. Why, I know a cat connected with a periodical in the City, who stands at the door of the publishing office every morning waiting for the gentleman who sells cat’s meat and supplies her with her breakfast; and when he comes and holds out the matutinal skewer, she says, with the purest accent, “Mou!” which everybody knows is the Greek for “mine.” And if a cat can talk Greek, pray why should not a dog invoke a Roman deity—more especially when you remember there is such a thing as dog Latin?

I repeat, therefore, that Cæsar, having exclaimed "By Jove!" leapt into the field and bounded down to the pond. The boys were too intent on their employment, whatever it might be, to notice him. But the Doctor, looking at them to see what had drawn so strong a remark from Cæsar, saw them fling something into the water. It was a small dark object, apparently not inanimate, for it seemed to give a struggle as it flew through the air.

Splash! went the small object into the water. Almost at the same moment, Cæsar, bounding through the group of boys, upsetting two on the muddy margin, and sending one over-shoes into the pond, arrived on the scene. There was another splash, and the big dog leaped at the spot where the small object had vanished. He disappeared for a short second, and then came up carrying something in his mouth. Holding it up clear of the water he turned round and, with two rapid strokes, touched ground, and walked ashore. Then giving himself one good shake that sprinkled the dirty water contemptuously over the urchins, who wisely kept aloof, and did not attempt to interfere with him, Cæsar trotted up the field, jumped into the garden, and coming up to his master, laid at his feet an ugly, half-drowned, muddy, mongrel puppy, with about half a brickbat attached to its neck.

This half brickbat evidently not having been attached to the poor foundling's neck by its parent with a view to possible future identification, the

Doctor whipped a lancet out of his pocket, and cut the string. Cæsar was evidently quite delighted at the notice his master bestowed upon his *protégé*. He was clearly very proud of his feat, though, probably, he never dreamt of such a thing as a medal from the Humane Society.

What was the Doctor to do with the little wretch? After the first impulse which led him to free it from the brickbat, he was quite at a loss what to do with it. Not so Cæsar. Cæsar, I have told you, was a dog who took his tub regularly, though in no purer element than the pond afforded. But as dogs turn up their noses at Eau de Cologne, and would probably delight in the odour of the gutters of that ill-savoured town, it is probable that Cæsar after his bath believed himself not only washed but perfumed—which he undoubtedly was; and so his desire for cleanliness remains unimpeached. He looked at the muddy, draggled puppy, and at once proceeded to clean him. Now, though Cæsar could say “By Jove!” quite intelligibly, he did not carry a pocket-handkerchief, so he was obliged to have recourse to the red rag which nature had supplied him with, having placed it in the only pocket she provided him with—a pocket, moreover, which, if you had put a pat of butter in it, you would have found had a hole in it.

Well, Cæsar set to work cleansing the puppy in what, considering his powers of language, I must call a primitive fashion. He licked him in the most amicable manner, and as he was large and strong,

and the puppy small and weak, and the process necessarily rather rough, he licked him half across the grass plot, and would probably have licked him all across it, and across the stable-yard into the road, if he had not brought up against the stem of the mulberry-tree. Having got him well against that, he contrived in time to get him comparatively clean.

The process I have described as rough; but you would, I daresay, say the same of the Humane Society's method of reviving the drowned. I am bound to say it did not much resemble the rules laid down by the Society in question, for in the course of the operation the puppy got stood on his head and rolled over and over. But it certainly did him good, for by the time he was clean of the mud, he was able to stand up and toddle about upon his odd legs—always going straight forward with an air as if his head was so heavy it kept pulling him forward in spite of the efforts of his tail to balance it. He went straight forward until he ran up against something, when he would sit down on his hind quarters and regard the world with an injured and bewildered air, until he took it into his head to get up again, when his head would take him, in turn, and lead him in a fresh direction. All this Cæsar watched with the most affectionate interest, every now and then uttering such remarks as "hooray!" (he did not say "hurrah!"—nobody ever does) and "go it!" whenever the puppy did anything very clever, or the reverse.

In a word, Cæsar displayed such an evident

attachment to his waif, that the Doctor could not find it in his heart to deprive him of the pup. So Cæsar from that day forth took the youngster under his wing—if a dog may be said to have a wing—giving him a corner of his kennel and a share of his dinner.

The next puzzle for the Doctor was how to christen the cur. At first he meditated calling him "Commentaria," in joking allusion to the Commentaries which Cæsar carried in his mouth when he swam for his life in the bay of Alexandria. But the Doctor felt that the vulgar might mispronounce the name "common tarrier"—which, whatever else he might be, the puppy decidedly was not—and that this might damage his reputation for a knowledge of canine breeding, and that was a point he was sensitive upon, and perhaps all the more that he felt it due to the memory of Whacky Stinger to maintain his dignity in this respect.

Finally, having a certain touch of a contrary spirit, just a mental cast in his eye—and there is no really good fellow who has not some crotchet of the sort in his brain—he determined to call the puppy Brutus. If you stand on your head you will see clearly the reason of his doing so. Indeed, the reason is obvious to the meanest capacity, so if you can't discover it, yours is not the meanest capacity, you will say.

Of course I take it for granted that you know Brutus assassinated Cæsar in the Capitol at Rome.

He might—if he had possessed a prophetic

spirit—have called the puppy Brutus, because he was a brute. It would not have been a classical rendering, but I don't think the puppy would have discovered it.

He certainly was a brute. In return for Cæsar's unvarying kindness and consideration he displayed the most selfish and petty spite. In fact, he tyrannized over the big dog, who, never having had children of his own to bring up, had spoilt him, and did not know how to correct the errors of his education as he grew older.

The cur snapped and snarled at his preserver perpetually, and at last actually turned him out of his own kennel. Cæsar had to sleep where he could, while Brutus stretched his limbs in the barrel full length—and even then did not reach across it. As for bones, if Cæsar wanted to enjoy his dinner he was obliged to take it on the roof of the pig-stye, which he could jump upon with ease, but which was beyond Brue's reach altogether. Even there, the peace of his meal must have been disturbed by the reflection that the moment he got down, the cur, who was waiting for him with unwearying malignity, would bite his legs and hang on his ears.

Cæsar bore all this persecution with wonderful serenity. But his master could not bear to see it. He gave Brue away several times ; but where his want of amiability did not lead to his return, his instinct did.

He had given him to Tomkins, the grocer, who wanted a dog for a cheese warehouse, that was

overrun with rats. But Brutus, after eating half a Dutch cheese, and tearing Mrs. Tomkins' apron to ribbons when she went to chastise him, finished off by keeping Tomkins out of his own cheese store while Squire Gamble was at the door with his carriage waiting for some Stilton to take home for dinner. The Squire, learning the cause of the delay, had the weakness to praise Brue's spirit, whereupon the delighted Tomkins implored him to accept the beast as a peace-offering. The Squire, it so happened, was in want of a dog to guard his hen-house, so he accepted him ; and Brue, having been enticed out of the warehouse by a plate of meat, was snatched up and conveyed to the carriage, leaving a mark of his regard and esteem—in the shape of a distinct impression of his canine teeth—on the back of Tomkins' hand.

But Brutus was not to stay long with Mr. Gamble. He certainly guarded the hen-house effectually—so effectually that the servants could not get the eggs. But soon it was discovered that he had taken a liking to poultry, so he was removed from his post, for which deposition he avenged himself by tasting the calves of the little Gambles all round, topping up with the baby : whereupon he was presented by the Squire to a neighbouring farmer. But Brutus suddenly developed a taste for milk, and was not to be kept out of the dairy, so he was transferred to Grimes, the gamekeeper—first of all because Grimes did not keep cows, and therefore had no dairy, and secondly, because it was believed

that if Brutus ever was to be trained, here was the man to train him. But Brutus had not been in Grimes' possession a week before he turned his attention to sheep. Having hunted two or three into ditches, and killed and half eaten a lamb, he was pronounced by Grimes to be incorrigible. So Grimes handed him back to the farmer, and the farmer returned him to the Squire, and the Squire took him to Tomkins again, and Tomkins brought him to the Doctor, with a long face and a longer tale of his misdeeds.

"Why the deuce didn't some of 'em shoot him?" thought the Doctor. But Cæsar, poor, foolish, affectionate Cæsar, was delighted to see his friend again. Brutus, however, had not been schooled by adversity, and did not appreciate the kindness he met. He resumed his old system of annoyance, and continued it until one day exasperated beyond measure by some act of cruelty towards Cæsar, the Doctor took him down to the canal and presented him to the proprietor of a barge, who promised to keep him tied up until he was miles away from Muddlesfield.

And so he did. But the first use Brue made of his liberty was to bolt straight off home, finding his way by his most wonderful instinct, and arriving so thin, and hungry, and tired, that he did not even turn Cæsar out of his own kennel, but lay down beside him to sleep. The Doctor could not but admire him for his pluck and cleverness in finding his way; and if Brue had only learnt experience from the

past, all might have been well. But, alas, in a few days, as soon as he had recovered the effects of his journey, Brue was in possession of the kennel, and Cæsar was limping off with torn ears to sleep in the cart-shed.

There sat Brue in front of the barrel, very cheeky and self-satisfied, snapping at the flies, and occasionally, when he thought the Doctor was looking at him, sweeping a little semicircle on the pebbles quite free from dust with his odd stump of a tail. He certainly did, in a sort of way, respect the Doctor ;—there was so much grace in Brutus that he recognized his master, not in the sense of proprietorship, but of power. There are people whom dogs understand at a glance, and respect as being their superiors. The Doctor was one of them. By some canine Freemasonry, he was quite at home with dogs. The most ferocious beasts at the farms, whether he was called professionally, recognized him. It was not a familiar recognition such as one accords to an acquaintance, but that sort of acknowledgment of something in common which the stiffest Englishman is betrayed into when he meets another Englishman, quite a stranger to him, abroad.

I can explain what I mean geometrically ; at least, I suppose I may call it geometrically. Every circle being divisible into a hundred and eighty degrees, you will understand what I mean when I say that a dog, recognizing his master from the ownership point of view, describes by the wag of his tail an arc of about forty-five degrees. If he adds to this sense

of ownership a feeling of affectionate attachment, he will extend the arc to ninety degrees ; perhaps, if he is very demonstrative and impulsive, going so far as even to touch one hundred and thirty-five degrees. (I defy a dog of the most active and affectionate nature to manage a hundred and eighty, and would not recommend any enterprising dog, under whose notice these pages may chance to come, to try it, for fear of dislocation.) Well, the way in which a strange dog owned the Doctor was by describing with his index, very slowly and distinctly, an arc not exceeding twenty degrees—and only once.

This is a good deal too much about a dog's tail, perhaps. But the digression will be pardoned by those who know what an important feature it is. It is the kynometer: if you watch it, you will know what doggy is thinking about, which, if you are foolish enough to have been alarmed by the late absurd panic about dogs, is a matter you will probably think important. To be sure, I have known a dog who wagged his tail when he bit you. But he was the victim of over civilization, having mixed too much with some human beings, whom no Act of Parliament has ordered to be muzzled, and nobody thinks of shooting or drowning.

But to return to Brutus. He sat, as I have described, in front of his kennel, describing an arc of forty-five degrees—I must be precise after my illustration—with his stump of a tail, and winking as the sun fell full upon him.

"You don't happen to want a dog, I suppose?" said the Doctor.

"Well, I don't know that I do," said the curate.

"Because," said the Doctor, not noticing the reply, "if you do, there's the article!"

"He's a sharp-looking customer."

"He is, indeed. You want a dog—better have him."

"Do you really propose giving him to me?"

"My dear Mountford, I shall be delighted!"

And that was the truth too, for the Doctor had determined to get rid of Brutus somehow that very day, and he didn't want to shoot him, for amongst other cranks, he was very scrupulous about taking life. He shot and he fished, it is true, but he consumed what he killed or caught, and had a horror of *battues*—"shooting for the papers," as some one has very properly named such "sport." As for fox-hunting, I suppose he defended it on the ground that Reynard was vermin, though he would hardly have liked to apply so hard a name to a fellow he had such a sneaking kindness for.

He was very glad, therefore, when the Reverend Meyrick Mountford, curate of Beechworth, showed an inclination to accept Brutus.

"But how am I to get him home?" asked Mountford.

"Oh, I'll lend you a chain and collar. Keep him chained up for a day or two, feed him yourself, and he'll soon get fond of you, and follow you."

"Well, thank you, I *will* accept your offer."

"Here, Mark!" shouted the Doctor.

A shock-head made its appearance at the stable-door.

"Mark, just get that collar and chain out of the surgery, and put it round Brue's neck for Mr. Mountford."

Mark obeyed with alacrity, not unmixed with alarm when it came to the buckling of the collar round Brue's neck. I must confess the Doctor felt a little anxiety at that stage too. Mark expected to have the brute's fangs in his wrist, and his master dreaded some revelation of his evil disposition that would lead to Mountford's declining the proffered gift. For a wonder, however, Brutus took the treatment quietly.

"Ye durned ugly beggar," Mark confided to him, in a whisper, as he fastened the strap, "I'm mighty glad you're off; and I hope and trust the parson'll feed you on nowt but old sarmons and the rough end of a pea-stick. Ugh, ye beast!"

Brutus quite understood all this, and replied with a brief exhibition of his back-teeth in a defiant grin. The man took the hint, and did not resume his address, but led Brue to where the curate was standing.

"Just get a biscuit, Mark. You can put it in your pocket, Mountford, and give him a bit now and then, if he does not seem inclined to follow well."

Armed with the biscuit and these directions, the confiding curate took a grateful farewell of the

Doctor, and set off homeward leading his precious charge.

The Doctor looked after him until he turned the corner of the lane. Then he gave a sigh of relief.

"Well, I'm glad I've got rid of that 'ornary cuss.' I only hope he wont turn upon Mountford on his way across the fields, and rend him. However, Mountford's a bachelor, and I suppose was accustomed to a dog when he was at college. The beast can't do much harm with him. I trust, too, he wont take him into the school-room with him, for after his experience with the little Gambles he'll never be able to resist a nip at the bare legs. I wonder how long he'll keep him, or what will become of him."

With these words, the Doctor gave the reins a shake, and set out on his rounds.

CHAPTER II.

THE CURATE'S DOG.

MEYRICK MOUNTFORD was one of those quiet, inoffensive men who follow everybody's inclinations but their own. I doubt whether he ever really had an inclination of his own from mere force of the habit of letting others direct him.

"I suppose you would like to go to college," said his uncle. Meyrick had been left an orphan

when he was very young, and his uncle was his guardian.

"I suppose you would like to go to college?" said his uncle; and Meyrick, who had never given the matter a moment's thought, said "Yes," at once; not because the idea, so suddenly suggested, seemed to open up a pleasant prospect, but simply because he had not the courage to say, "No." If his guardian had put the question in another form; if he had said, "You wouldn't like to go to college?" Meyrick would have promptly disclaimed any desire for academic honours.

But as his uncle framed the question in the way he did, it was determined that Meyrick should go to college "as he wished." When asked to decide between Oxford and Cambridge, he was quite at a loss which to choose, until his uncle began to say that "he himself was an Oxford man, but—" whereupon Meyrick selected Oxford on the spot.

He went up to Oxford accordingly, and entered at Balliol, where the tutors expected great things of him. He was very studious and steady, and the dons talked of him among themselves as one of their promising colts. In due time he went in for his "little go." Through his paper work he came triumphantly, for the questions, being carefully framed so as to be vague, were all so worded that he was not tempted by his acquiescing disposition to yield a point, as he would have considered, to the examiners.

But at last came the fatal hour of *vivâ voce* exa-

mination. By ill luck it fell to Meyrick's lot to be examined by old Pragmatt of Oriel. There was at this time a tacit contest going on between the two colleges as to the number of classmen they could turn out, and old Pragmatt was a warm partizan of his own college, and carried his animosity so far, being an examiner in the schools, as to give very severe handling to all Balliol candidates, even when they were only in for a pass.

His first question to Meyrick was so artfully contrived, that it suggested the wrong answer. And Meyrick, with the internal consciousness of what was right, answered wrong. Old Pragmatt was delighted. He chuckled inwardly till his jolly red gills became almost purple, thinking that he had led the Balliol man into a trap. He tried again, and again. And still poor Meyrick allowed himself to be misled, in spite of his knowledge that he was going wrong. At last, the hopeless state of complication into which he was carried became too fearful even for him to bear. The men who were in the schools were tittering, and the other examiners could hardly help smiling.

Meyrick even could not stand this any longer.

"If—if—you would allow me—if—if—you were to—to give it me to do on—on paper," he stammered.

That was enough! He had given old Pragmatt his opportunity. Tearing off from the corner of a sheet of paper that was lying before him a fragment about the size of his thumb-nail, old P. gravely handed it to Meyrick, with these words—

"Go to your seat, sir, and write down all you know on *that*!"

You may guess after this there was no testamur for "Gulielmus Meyrick Mountford, e, Coll. Ball.," when the clerk of the schools distributed his shilling slips of paper that afternoon.

Meyrick was plucked. They were very strict at Balliol in such matters, so he had to migrate to the Hall. He went to St. Mary Hall, better known as Skimmery, probably on account of the superficial nature of the learning acquired there.

From St. Mary Hall poor Meyrick managed to pass all his examinations, not without a few failures. And then he took his degree.

"What do you mean to do now?" asked his guardian. "Do you think of taking orders?"

Of course, the immediate answer was, "Yes;" and, as a consequence, in a few months he was appointed to the curacy of Beechworth. And curate of Beechworth he was likely to be till the day of his death, though I believe, if it had suddenly occurred to Lord Russell (or Lord Shaftesbury, perhaps I should say,) to go down and say to him, "Meyrick Mountford, you would like to be Archbishop of Canterbury," he would not have hesitated one single instant to say, "Yes, my lord." As such a course, however, did not suggest itself to the Prime-Minister, Meyrick still remained curate of Beechworth, and owing to that fact, became owner of that remarkable dog, Brutus.

Meyrick did not want a dog. When Valentine

said to him, "I suppose you don't want a dog," Meyrick for once answered sincerely in saying, "I don't think I do." But when the Doctor pressed him, and suggested, "You had better have him," the question was settled. He was doomed then, and for all the volition he could exercise might just as well have had the collar put round his neck, and the chain given to Brue to lead him about by. He became, in fact, the property of Brutus.

By some strange contradiction, the dog, so ill-behaved to most people, became really attached to Meyrick, who did not care for him—in fact, disliked him as much as it was in his nature to dislike anything—except having a will of his own.

Brue would never allow his master to go out without him, and utterly ignored that unhappy man's feeble attempts to dispense with his attendance. As a result, the appearance of the curate at the door of the village school-room was the signal for a general clambering upon forms and stools, in order to the removal of all and sundry mottled plump legs from the vicinity of Brue's nose. This mild form of mountaineering, though very beneficial, if we may believe the Alpine Club, as far as the young persons themselves were concerned, was not conducive to discipline, nor quite the sort of feeling the curate's arrival should have excited. The result was that poor Meyrick had to give up attending the schools, or only visited them on the sly when Brue was otherwise occupied than in mounting guard over him. But even this artfulness on the part of Mey-

rick could not outwit Brue. Meyrick, perhaps, left the animal intent on a bone, and stole over to the school, and then sneaked off to see some sick parish-ioner who "couldn't abear dogs!" He had left the school five minutes, perhaps, when a howl would be set up by some urchin near the door, and Brue, who had waked up from the bone, missed Meyrick, and set out to find him, would make his appearance, quarter the school-room as if he were trying for a covey of partridges, and then disappear at full speed on his master's trail.

The irresistible temptation which infantile legs had had for Brue ever since he first tasted the calves of the juvenile Gambles is a thing unexplainable. I have known a respectable maiden lady who could not resist periwinkles. I would not have trusted her by herself for five minutes with my marine aquarium, where I cherish one or two specimens of *Littorina* that have, I hope, escaped for ever the pin of the gourmand. I myself have a desire for nuts, which not the liveliest picture my imagination can produce of the agonies of indigestion has the slightest power to overcome. Children's calves to Brue must have had a combined flavour of walnuts and periwinkles, I suppose.

But if Brue's visits had been confined to the school, or even had not gone beyond the poor cottages, where his appearance was generally the signal for the immediate exit of the cat through the window, whether open or shut, it would not have mattered much, except for the brisk trade it

brought the village glazier. It was a little too much of a good thing, however, when he visited the church, as he did on one or two occasions, to the great scandal of his congregation and the pain and grief of the clerk.

The first time he made his appearance, he seemed rather overcome by the concourse of persons he saw around him, and sat down in the middle aisle with the air of a dog who wishes to recall his scattered senses. This appearance of innocence restored peace in the chancel, where the school-children found it almost impossible to curb the instinct to get their legs out of his reach.

Meyrick was in the pulpit, just about to begin his sermon. No sooner did Brue hear his voice than he gave a yelp of delight, rushed up the pulpit-stairs, and began to bound about his master's legs. Meyrick was equal to the emergency. For once he asserted himself. He pushed Brue out of the pulpit, shut the door, and proceeded to begin with his sermon afresh. But Brue was not disposed to take his exit quietly. He began to whimper and then to whine, until his grief became so demonstrative that Farmer Chapman, who was one of the churchwardens leant over his pew and told Charles Bowden, the clerk, to "putt yon dog out."

Charles did not like the task, but a churchwarden was a churchwarden, so he proceeded to obey.

"Ger out!" said Charles in a subdued tone, from the bottom of the pulpit-stairs.

Brutus did not speak, but he curled his lip back as if Charles had been a dentist anxious to inspect his wisdom-teeth.

"Ger out, will ye?" said Charles, more sternly, planting his foot on the bottom stair.

"G-r-r-r-r!" said Brutus.

"Come out, ye beast," said Charles, going up another stair, and aiming a kick rather wide at the dog.

"G-r-r-a-ah!" answered Brutus, opening his mouth ready for a snap.

Another kick, and then the snap came. Brue's teeth did not fix, but they struck Charles' skin pretty smartly, whereat the clerk hobbled away, uttering something that wasn't a response, and rubbing his leg.

"Go and fetch him off yourself," was his rebellious remark to Farmer Chapman, as he passed him. But Farmer Chapman thought better of it.

As for Meyrick, of course he had done all a parson could do under the circumstances. To have expected him to do more would have been unreasonable.

He had put the dog out of the pulpit, shut the door, and continued his discourse. If you would have had him get out of the pulpit, take Brue by the scruff of the neck, carry him down the middle aisle to the church door, and thence fling him out beyond the porch, all I can say is, you would be like the landlord of the Bald-faced Stag in the Borough.

"And who," you ask, "is the landlord of the Bald-faced Stag in the Borough?"

The landlord of the Bald-faced Stag in the Borough is a man of action. I will tell you why I know he is a man of action.

On the thirty-first of November, in the year of grace eighteen hundred and sixty-two—to be particular as to dates—and at precisely about eighty-five minutes past one—to be careful as to time—I entered the hostelry in question. It was bitterly cold weather, and I had just come off a long journey by rail, and needed something hot.

The shutters were half-closed, and there were mutes standing at the private door, and I therefore conjectured that the bar would not be overcrowded. I was right. The Bald-faced Stag was not driving a roaring trade, and I had my wants supplied promptly and quietly. A gentleman, evidently a frequenter of the place, whom not even the depressing effect of a semi-twilight produced by the shutters could drive from his haunt, and who had a pink nose and a husky voice, explained to me that the rosy gentleman behind the bar was the landlord, and that the funeral was that of his wife. Just as my new friend was going into particulars as to the life that the lady in question led the red-faced gentleman in shirt sleeves, the swing-door was pushed open, and one of the mutes thrust in a face quite blue with cold, and hinted to the landlord that "a something" might be of great assistance

in keeping himself and friend from being frozen at their post.

"Pooh, pooh, pooh!" said mine host, "jump about and keep yourself warm!"

He was a man of action that man, as I said; but action is not everything, and even that great teacher of elocution, whose dictum about "action—action—action!" has come down to us, would hardly have applied it to mutes, or to clergymen under the exceptional circumstances of having favourite dogs following them into the pulpit.

Brue sat out the sermon, but was, I fear, not greatly edified. At first he fidgeted and complained, but after a time the gentle flow of the discourse had a sedative effect on him, and he did what I am afraid a good many others of the congregation did—he settled himself down comfortably, and went to sleep.

There was no more disturbance in church on that occasion, but I fear the little escapade of Master Brutus was somewhat damaging to poor Meyrick. His congregation were always on the alert to see Brue's black muzzle come popping over the pulpit cushion.

Never was poor creature so tormented by his evil genius as Meyrick was by Brutus!

"What an odd-looking dog for a clergyman," young ladies would remark to one another, as they met Meyrick walking about, followed by Brue—I was going to say pursued by his destiny.

Brue looked so dreadfully "sporting"—he had

all the Bohemian cut of a canine artist who could draw a badger to perfection. The very perk he gave his tail looked like fighting, and a meditative habit which he had of smelling your calves, with a slight internal grumble, as if somehow their symmetry was not what it should have been, was calculated to fill the breast of a casual acquaintance with awe and doubt.

“Eh, Jem, yon’s too good-looking a dogg for a pa’son,” one navvy would say to another, as they passed Meyrick, in tones that were quite audible by the gentleman in charge of Brutus. And when I say in charge of Brutus, I mean that he was in the custody of that pleasant cur who used to take him very much where he pleased.

If Meyrick had ever possessed a chance—and as he was a distant connection of the Bishop’s, and as bishops are naturally in a position to know, more (or less) the aptitude of all their relations for clerical labours, there did seem some hope of his getting preferment in the diocese, that chance of promotion was rudely and rapidly destroyed by his “fatal and perfidious” dog.

A bishop may forgive a good many things. He may think it right to consign to oblivion the fact that, when there is a meeting anent convocation in a certain town, it is as well for the vicar, supposing him to be absent from the meeting, not to be found by his diocesan at the railway station, waiting the arrival of a sitting of eggs;—because poultry, after all, is a pardonable penchant. But no bishop

that ever yet donned apron and shovel-hat could overlook such performances as Brue was guilty of. For when there was a confirmation at Beechworth, and all the young people were marching along the High Street in solemn procession, a fit of the old Berserker madness apparently seized Brutus, and sent him careering after his master (who was leading the procession), and taking sly nips at all the legs that looked inviting as he passed. His path might have been traced by the confusion and shrieks observable in the particular part of the procession he reached. The Bishop was scandalized, but he never supposed Brue was a clerical dog.

But, alas! as ill luck would have it, Mrs. Valisay's tabby kitten was sunning herself on the door-step in front of Mrs. V.'s shop. She watched the procession file past with a calm and contented expression of countenance as if it had been got up for her especial entertainment, which, I dare say, she really believed to be the case. Cats, as well as human beings, occasionally form erroneous estimates of their own importance.

"Pep"—so Mrs. V. had christened the tabby kitten, for reasons which it is now impossible to discover—was the eldest of ten; at least it was argued she was the eldest, because she was the first of the number to open her pale blue eyes, and walk about, with some pretence to vision, on the ninth day of her age. She was beautifully marked, and had grown so rapidly that she was bordering on girlhood, and the period when all the Toms in the

neighbourhood would break their hearts, and scratch one another's faces, for the love of her.

Unfortunate Pep! as she was gazing critically, with chin upraised and eyes half-closed, she became conscious of the arrival of a foe. Her fur bristled and her tail swelled instantaneously; but before she had time to arch her back, or spit out the first words of an imprecation on dogs—how some cats *do* swear!—she was stricken with a sharp pang across the loins, gave one shriek, and paid the debt of nature with a lump sum of nine lives.

Her destroyer was Brue; and so delighted was he with the masterly manner in which he had killed the cat, that he carried the body in his mouth, proudly, until he came to the churchyard gate, where his master was standing to let the procession file past.

Brutus trotted up to his master, laid puss down at his feet, and then sat down himself, wagging his tail and smiling broadly, in the hope of attracting attention to his feat; but Meyrick was otherwise occupied. He was inspecting the young people as they marched by, and, I am afraid, was very much annoyed to observe an air of levity on their countenances, which was not to be wondered at when you remember that they saw Brue mounting guard behind his master over Pep's remains.

"Is that your dog, Mr. Mountford!" said the Bishop, severely.

Meyrick looked round; that was enough for Brue, who, seeing that at last he had attracted his

master's notice, rose, took up the cat, and, walking towards Meyrick, laid it at his feet.

The Bishop did not want an answer, Meyrick could not find one; and there sat Brue grinning and wagging his tail as furiously as if he had made up his mind to solve the great difficulty, and wag over an area of one hundred and eighty degrees, or perish in the attempt.

Mrs. Vallisay's shop, I should have told you, was opposite the bank. Frank Nesbitt, son of the manager of the bank, was looking out of the window as the procession passed, and he saw and admired the masterly manner in which, to use his own term, Brue "turned up the cat."

Imagine the delight of Meyrick when that afternoon young Nesbitt asked him if he was inclined to part with his dog. "Inclined!" He was only too charmed, for he was too soft-hearted to think of destroying him, and yet was most anxious to get rid of him.

Frank Nesbitt was that not very agreeable sort of person, the fast young man of a provincial town. His father was wealthy, and the bank the most prosperous one in the county; so Frank obtained a species of immunity for his escapades. He affected to be a sporting man; betted, and gambled, and drank with the wild young farmers of the district, and those horsey sharpers who seem to spring into life wherever a race-horse has set his foot;—there were training-stables near Beechworth. He fancied he saw in Brue the making of a dog that

might be trained to beat Ratty Glover's white bull-terrier.

The upshot of the conversation between Meyrick and Frank Nesbitt was that Brutus became the property of the latter, and that each of the parties concerned believed he had done a good stroke of business.

Frank lived a couple of miles out of Beechworth, on the Balderton Road. Brutus was therefore taken out to his house, and chained up for a day or two to accustom him to his new quarters.

And there was a feeling of relief and contentment in Meyrick's mind, to which he had long been a stranger.

CHAPTER III.

THE BANKER'S DOG.

THE chief reason why Meyrick Mountford was so delighted to get rid of Brutus was Miss Vimpany—Miss Zenobia Vimpany.

The late Mr. Barnabas Vimpany, a distinguished inhabitant of Beechworth, had made his fortune "in the hardware." He was one of the local magnates, an honour to the town in which he was born and bred—and educated, so far as he was educated. Little, I am sure, did Mr. Drape, who was master of the Beechworth grammar school, suspect that the rather dull boy who was always bottom of the class, would die one of the great men of the

place—least of all, I imagine, did he suppose he would distinguish himself “in the hardware.”

“Vimpany,” said Mr. Drape, one morning, when geography was the intellectual feast, “Vimpany, what is Birmingham celebrated for?”

“Hardware,” said Vimpany, after gazing twice at the ceiling and once at the floor.

“Right,” said the astonished Mr. Drape; “and what is hardware?”

Thereupon Vimpany rose to the occasion, and without wasting time in appeals to floor or ceiling, said boldly, “Butter—cheese—eggs, and sich.” And yet this was the man who was to become a very respectable fraction of a millionaire on account of dealings in the very article whose nature he so misunderstood.

Some men rise on account of military genius—some by their legal knowledge—others by skill in healing—by literary or artistic proficiency, or scholarly learning. Vimpany rose by virtue of hardware. When he quitted this world and his snug business in High Street, he left his only child, an orphan girl of three-and-thirty, the heiress of Beechworth.

She was young and impulsive—for her age; but, alas, the youths of Beechworth somehow didn’t seem to see anything taking in her. She pined without a lover for two years, but being of an affectionate disposition, with a great deal of heart to let, she surrounded herself with pets:—a Brazilian monkey, two cats, a grey parrot (who had evidently

learnt English from a bibacious sailor), and a pair of turtle-doves.

When Meyrick Mountford came to Beechworth, he had a sister who came to live with him and keep house for him. But she married an old Oxford chum of his who had a small college living, so Meyrick was thrown on his own resources, which were not large. In fact they were very small, and the peculiarities of his disposition tended to make his domestic life a misery. The agony it was to him to order his dinner is indescribable. He determined to marry!

Having come to this determination, all he had to do was to decide on the lady he wished to share his name, his lodgings, and his stipend. Zenobia Vimpany instantly occurred to him. She was not too young—no! decidedly not too young!—and she could keep house, of course, because she had had to rule her own household for several years, and she was comfortably off, and not likely to reject his hand and heart, etc., etc., etc. I need not recapitulate at greater length the reasons he found for prosecuting his suit in this direction.

Zenobia was not hard-hearted. She reciprocated Meyrick's feelings, and before long they were engaged. All went smoothly, though now and then, owing to Meyrick's fatal habit of acquiescence, their peace was threatened. For Zenobia, giddy young thing, would at times indulge in coy playfulness, and say all sorts of things for the mere sake of contradiction. "You don't love me, Meyrick?" she

would say sometimes with a sigh and an ogle, whereupon Meyrick would say, "No," in the most charmingly obliging manner, and then there would be a little complication and tears.

On the whole, however, they got along admirably well, and their wedding was fixed for the spring of the next year. Meyrick began to look on himself in the light of an old married man. He even got so far as to have long internal discussions as to whether, when his Zenobia relinquished the name of Vimpany for that of Mountford, he should call her Zinny or Nobby for short.

But there was a greater puzzle and a worse difficulty for poor Meyrick than the decision of a pet name for his future spouse. He married not only Zenobia, but one Brazilian monkey, two cats, a grey parrot (who had evidently learnt English from a bibacious sailor), and a pair of turtle-doves. Personally he had not the slightest objection to these additions to his family. But unluckily Brutus had a voice in the matter, and Meyrick felt that, however well that most trying animal would agree with a pair of turtle-doves—a grey parrot (who had evidently acquired the English tongue from a mariner of intemperate habits), or even a Brazilian monkey, there would be no peace in the house that contained him and a couple of cats.

Zenobia knew of the existence of Brutus, but she was in ignorance of any peculiarity of his character, except that he was a little too regular in his attendance at church. Being, however, fond of

animals, she did not object very strongly to this, but rather admired his attachment to his master.

Meyrick never took Brutus with him when he went to call on his Zenobia, and in order to prevent his following him, used to lock him up in his study, as he did also on Sundays, after the little scene I described in the last chapter. Brutus was a subject that Meyrick always avoided when he could, and especially in his conversations with Miss Vimpany, for he knew what a drawback he would be to their married felicity, and the comfort of Mob and Bob, Miss V.'s two cats.

Imagine his delight, then, when Frank Nesbitt took his tyrant off his hands! But he did not say a word to Zenobia on the subject.

One day towards the end of the year, in the dusk of the evening, Zenobia was seated at her parlour window, working. She was not "tatting"—the name given to a method of making sham embroidery—of a very scrubby and hard character, one would imagine, to wear next one's skin; nor was she doing wool-work, reproducing anatomically impossible figures, or flowers and butterflies, that botany and entomology never saw the like of; nor was she knotting whip-cord under the name of crochet; nor was she engaged upon insertion or appliqué work, or any of those mysterious and complicated schemes for wasting time and spoiling material, which are dignified by the title of "Fancy Work."

She was, to be candid, knitting woollen stockings—and very expert she was at it; there wasn't

another girl of her age in all Beechworth who could "turn a heel" as she could—even in the dark. For she was working without a candle, sitting by the window, and occasionally resting a minute or two, and gazing out of window.

I ought to have told you that Miss Vimpany's house was at the corner of West Street, down which you turned to get to the Balderton Road.

Mob was sitting at Miss Vimpany's feet, purring pleasantly as she watched the gambols of Squab, the last surviving of nine kittens that she had recently brought into the world. Eight had perished under painful circumstances, which I may faintly adumbrate by mentioning a pail full of water with the copper-lid on the top to prevent their getting out. Squab was preserved to be a solace for his mother, who, poor thing, had had her troubles. She was not a Manx cat, though her appearance might have led you to suppose so: she had been deprived of her tail by a vermin-trap she fell in with while on the look-out for young rabbits. And she owed the loss of an eye to a flint thrown at her by young Wadge, the grocer's boy, and had been deprived of half an ear by a rough terrier with whom she had had a dispute about the right of way across the street.

Miss Vimpany pitied Mob's misfortunes, and still extended to her the shelter of the hospitable roof she could no longer adorn under such circumstances of disfigurement. But Bob Miss Vimpany was very fond of. He was a magnificent fellow. A

rich brown tabby, with a white collar and shirt-frill, white socks and gloves, and a splendid white tip to his tail.

Like all handsome fellows, Bob was a bit of a scamp. He did not care much for the humdrum propriety of a domestic life with Mob at Miss Vimpany's. I regret to say he was frequently absent from the evening saucer of milk, and kept such late hours that Miss Vimpany had on one or two occasions to go downstairs with a flannel garment round her shoulders, to let him in, after she had retired to rest.

On this particular evening, Bob, the sleek and handsome rascal, had been out for a twilight promenade, and was returning home, quietly and stealthily crossing the road with the intention of dropping down the area and so effecting his return unnoticed. But the eyes of love were too sharp for him. Miss Vimpany detected him, recognized him in the gathering glooms of coming night, and said in a low voice of affection, "Oh, you naughty, naughty puss!"

Unfortunately for Bob, other eyes than those of love were on him. Frank Nesbitt and Brutus, a worthy pair, were strolling down town towards the Balderton Road. Frank had lost no opportunity of putting Brutus' felicitous powers to the test, and Brutus by dint of practice became perfect. The havoc he made among the cats of Beechworth was something tremendous. If rats and mice were only afflicted with human weaknesses, Brutus would have

been presented with a silver tea-service and a purse of sovereigns for his exertions in their cause.

As he and Frank arrived at the corner of the Balderton Road, they spied a fine large Tom cat cautiously picking his way across the street. Brutus pricked up his ears, and looked at his master inquiringly.

Frank surveyed the coast. There was no one in sight. He peeped round the corner, but as Miss V. was inside and the window down, he did not see her, nor did she see him. It was rather a frequented street though, Frank thought,—but after all Brue was so quiet and expeditious that there was no risk.

In the meantime Bob perceived his foe. He paused, hoping that Brue had not seen him, and would not notice him if he kept quite still. But Brue speedily undeceived him. Looking in Bob's direction, he gave a subdued "g-r-r-r-r!" that told puss he must fight or run. Bob looked forward and looked back; before he could reach shelter in any direction his enemy would be upon him. There was nothing for it but to fight.

He drew himself well together, and set up his back. His fur stood on end, his tail became a bottle brush of more than ordinary dimensions.

Miss Vimpany saw this change of demeanour, and looking out of the window, discerned its cause. She recognized the dog. It was, she said to herself, Meyrick's dog; he must be at hand, and would no doubt call his animal off.

Ah! what did she hear?

A whispered "S-st—fetch him, boy!"

Could she believe her ears? Before she had time to press the question, she had ample employment for her eyes.

Brue, encouraged by his master's subdued hint, dashed off at Bob instantly. Bob stood his ground. Brue pulled up. He was too wise a dog to run in, so he walked round his opponent, keeping a shoulder well forward in case of attack. Bob moved round too, presenting his front, and using language which showed that his morals had not been improved by the wild company and irregular hours he kept.

Brue saw he must alter his tactics, the more especially as his master was urging the necessity of promptitude.

"Go along, sir! S-st—fetch him, sir!" said Frank, still in an undertone, and keeping well out of sight round the corner.

Miss Vimpany was motionless with horror and astonishment. She could not be sure of the voice, but she believed it could be no one but Meyrick! To think of his feigning affection for her pets, and then setting his dog on Bob!

"S-st—fetch him!"

Brue made a feint of running in and seizing Bob's hind leg. Bob made a spring in the air, with the intention of escaping the snap and coming down on Brue's back. That evolution lost him. Before he could get back again into an attitude of defence Brue had him. He caught him across the loins, gave him one sharp grip and a quick shake,

and then trotted off with the corpse in his mouth after his master, who was running down the Balder-ton Road as fast as his laughter would let him.

Miss Vimpany sank back in her chair in an almost fainting condition. In fact, she would have fainted had not a shrill shriek and a struggle announced to her that while she had been looking out of the window Mob had taken Squab up in her mouth and deposited herself and kitten, for comfort, on the cushion of the easy-chair.

Miss Vimpany sprang up with alacrity, and in her terror lest she should have killed her two remaining feline pets in the same hour that saw Bob's decease, she forgot her intention of fainting. Squab was unhurt, but Mob appeared a little flattened, though she recovered in the course of the evening and lapped her saucer of milk, apparently unmoved by the loss of Bob.

Frank, I have told you, ran off down the Balder-ton Road, as soon as Brue and Bob closed. He had heard footsteps approaching and thought it as well to disappear.

The new arrival on the scene was the Reverend Meyrick Mountford. He had been visiting a sick parishioner, and remembering it was about the hour when his Zenobia's Bohea was usually forthcoming, he determined to pay his beloved a visit.

Brutus, on turning the corner, saw Frank taking to his heels, and immediately concluding that there was danger somewhere, dropped his prize and started after his master.

Meyrick, as he approached his Zenobia's door, saw a dark object on the pavement at the corner, and stooped to pick it up. It was the defunct Bob, and Meyrick recognized him at a glance.

"Poor thing," thought Meyrick; "I wonder what has killed him—poisoned, perhaps, or run over. I have no doubt Zenobia will be glad to have him restored, living or dead."

So he carried the cat to the house, knocked at the door, and was ushered into the parlour.

"Zenobia, my dear," he began, holding Bob towards Miss Vimpany. "Zenobia, my dear; I regret——"

Miss Vimpany turned to him coldly. Then she saw what he had in his hand!

"Go, wretch! cruel, heartless deceiver! leave me! Here, Martha"—she rang the bell furiously—"show that gentleman the door, and never admit him again. You wretch—you monster—you ug—ug—ug—ug—ug!" Here she broke down, and fairly went off into a fit of hysterics.

Meyrick would have assisted to restore her. But Martha, who was a strong, stupid maid-of-all-work, educated to obey her mistress to the letter, had had her orders. She insisted on his leaving the house. On his showing an inclination to resist, she displayed such an unmistakable determination to remove him by main force, that he was obliged to submit.

When the door slammed behind him, and he found himself fairly turned out of the abode of his

future bride, poor Meyrick was in a completely prostrate state of bewilderment. He was at a complete loss to discover what he had done to deserve such treatment. "He would write and demand an explanation." Having come to this determination he set off homewards, to put it into execution at once.

To make short of a long story, Meyrick succeeded, after no small amount of trouble and a vast deal of explanation, to clear his character in his lady love's eyes. There was a reconciliation and a renewing of love; and Meyrick took advantage of the opportunity, and improved the occasion to such purpose that his Zenobia, consenting to become a bride in a fortnight's time, made imminent and immediate the difficulty which had always proposed itself to Meyrick in deciding the relative claims of "Zinny" and "Nobby" as endearing appellatives for the wife of his bosom.

There was another difficulty in store for Meyrick.

Before the day dawned that was to make Zenobia Vimpany a thing of the past, and Zenobia Mountford a living and breathing reality, instead of the visionary occupant of Meyrick's day-dreams, Frank Nesbitt and Brutus were fated to dissolve partnership.

Some of Frank's escapades, of a more than ordinarily disreputable description, had come to his father's ears, and old Mr. Nesbitt had lectured his son severely and threatened him with condign punishment if he heard any further complaints.

The bank had a branch—established for the convenience of rich customers—at a small seaside village on the most lonely part of the coast, about twenty miles from Beechworth. In summer and autumn the place was crowded with visitors; in winter and spring it was a howling desert of empty lodgings. The branch bank, therefore, established at Seasby, as this watering-place was called, did no business at all at the end and the beginning of the year; but it had, of course, some one continually on the premises to look after them.

The clerks took their turns of duty there; the well-behaved and industrious getting the summer months, the idle and bad ones the winter. Seasby, in short, was the Paradise of the faithful bank-clerk, the Purgatory of the lazy one.

Mr. Nesbitt solemnly promised Frank that unless he reformed he should be sent down as permanent head of the branch during the spring and winter months—and the threat was an awful one to a youth of Frank's disposition and tastes.

Frank put himself on his best behaviour, and if he did "kick over the traces," as he called it, managed not to be found out. Not so Brutus! He had acquired for killing cats a taste that he was not hypocrite enough to conceal. He took to stealing out of the bank during business hours, and hunting on his own account. To this Frank would not have objected; but Brutus was so proud of his work that he was in the habit of bringing his game to the bank to show the results of his prowess. It

was no use shutting the door, because Brue would sit down outside, with his victim in his jaws, to the great scandal of the neighbourhood, until somebody came on business, when Brue would follow him into the bank and lay the cat on the counter, as if it were a cheque he wanted cashed or a deposit he was desirous of paying in.

Frank bore this for some time, but was so nearly being caught by his father so often, and had such difficulty at times to conceal Brue's victims from observation, that he felt he must get rid of the dog.

When, therefore, Miss Vimpany, passing the bank one day, saw Brue outside, the separation of Frank and Brue was as surely decreed as if Baron Wilde had done it in legal form.

Meyrick had concealed from his Zenobia the name of the person to whom he had presented Brutus. He had "given him away," he said, and Miss V. did not at the time think of asking to whom.

One morning, however, as she was passing the bank, she saw the unmistakable Brutus reposing on the mat at the bank door with a dead cat in his mouth, waiting for admission.

"Oh, the brute!" said Miss V. to herself, "now I'll find out who owns him—some of those clerks, I daresay!"

So she opened the door of the bank and went in, with a view to inquiring into the proprietorship of the dog. But Brutus took the opportunity—followed her in—jumped up on the counter, and

depositing his prey before his master, looked up in his face and wagged his tail.

Miss Vimpany had no need to ask whose dog he was! She requested to be shown into Mr. Nesbitt's room. Frank, with fear and trembling, opened the door and bowed her in, and made up his mind that Seasby would be his destination within the next twenty-four hours.

There was a storm! Miss Vimpany's account was a good one, and Mr. Nesbitt had a great respect for her, having known the late Mr. Vimpany at the time when he was "witching the world with," as the poet says, "noble" hardware. In vain Frank Nesbitt protested that the dog had a natural genius for killing cats, and that he had not cultivated the gift. Brutus was condemned. Frank, like all bad companions, turned upon his late partner in iniquity, and vowed he would shoot with his own hand the wretched cause of his exile to Seasby. But on reflection he devised a better scheme. He remembered that Meyrick had given him the dog, and that Meyrick was about to marry Miss Vimpany. The wedding was fixed for the next Saturday. He would keep Brutus concealed until the morning of that day and then return him to the curate, with a short note to say that in consequence of his having to go to Seasby he was obliged to give up keeping a dog, and so returned Brutus to his original owner.

With a view to carrying out this diabolical plan, he prevailed on his father to let him put off his departure for Seasby until the beginning of the next

week, and his father, ignorant, of course, of the reason of his request, granted him so much grace.

Frank got a trusty retainer to keep Brutus chained up in his yard until the Saturday, when he would take revenge on Miss Zenobia Vimpany for getting him sent off to Seasby.

CHAPTER IV.

NOBODY'S DOG.

On the morning of his wedding Meyrick sallied forth attired in a beautiful new suit of clothes, as became a bridegroom. It had been a wet night, but the morning was one of those sunny winter mornings with a fresh brisk air, that have all the beauties without any of the relaxing properties of summer days.

As Meyrick left his door he cast a natural glance of pride at his spotless linen and sleek sables, on which not even a speck of dust had been allowed to settle. Then, with the air of a man who is satisfied with his appearance, he strode down the street, humming the ghost of a tune, and taking little furtive peeps at his shiny boots, his dandy gloves, and the lie of his trouser over his instep.

Rudely were his meditations disturbed, and cruelly was his faultless apparel damaged ere he had got half way to the house of the friend who was to be

his best man, and with whom he had arranged to breakfast.

At the corner of Kittock's Lane there had been standing for some time a pensive, but not beautiful figure, holding a dog in a string.

That pensive, but not beautiful figure was Nicholas Shorts, the ostler of the Blue Dragon, Frank Nesbitt's retainer and worshipper.

That dog was Brutus. And Brutus had apparently been taking a stroll in rather muddy lanes that morning. He was an odd dog. He had been the property of too many different masters to have a deep affection for any of them, or to leave them with great pangs. But he had always had a greater liking than usual for Meyrick, so, when he saw him coming he gave a yelp and a great bound and planted the muddy marks of his forepaws on the poor gentleman's spotless shirt front, following up those impressions by repeated copies, until all the mud on his paws was transferred to the curate's wedding garb.

As for Nicholas Shorts, he was laughing so, inwardly, that he could not have pulled the dog away if he had tried. He had a message to give to Mr. Mountford, so he touched his cap and stood still.

Meyrick grew quite angry at last.

"Why don't you take him away?" he said to Nicholas.

"'Cos, if ye please, sir, I were told to bring him to you. Down, Brue, down! He's mighty fond o' you sure-ly. Well, then, sir, it's Mr. Nesbitt's com-

pliments and Brutus have a-took so to killing cats lately, he be 'bliged to return him to you, sir, with many thanks, sir, and very sorry as he can't keep him."

"But I can't take him back!" said Meyrick, almost shrieking it out in his horror; "I can't take him back."

"No more can't Mr. Nesbitt, sir; I were told to give him to you"—and Nicholas tendered the string to Meyrick.

"I can't, and won't take him back," repeated Meyrick.

"What be I to do wi' un, then?"

"Keep him yourself."

"Much obliged, sir, but I a-gotten a dog o' my own, and can't afford for to keep two."

"I can't have him—that's flat," said Meyrick.

"I can't keep 'un, and I were told to give 'un to you, and I must just take and leave him to your house."

What was poor Meyrick to do? He would do as Frank Nesbitt was doing—give the dog back to the man who gave him to him.

"Look here, my man!" said he to Nicholas, "if you'll take him over to Doctor Valentine, at Muddlesfield, I'll give you five shillings for your trouble."

Nicholas Shorts was not the man to refuse a good offer. He took the five shillings and a message—very much like the message he had brought from the banker to the curate—from the curate to the doctor.

"Come on, Brue," said he, as he turned down Kittock's Lane, "five and five's ten, lad, and you've been an easy ten shillin' to me this here blessed morning. Come on!"

Meyrick had to return to his house and re-decorate. It was easy enough to repair the damage which Brue had done in affixing his hand and seal to clean linen; but it was difficult work to remove all traces of his autograph from the new broadcloth. Eventually, however, by the aid of his best man, who came in alarm to see how it was the groom did not turn up to breakfast, Meyrick was restored to something like his original beauty and polish.

I am happy to be in a position to state that the wedding of the Reverend Meyrick Mountford and the fair Zenobia Vimpany, was unclouded by any farther misfortune. It is true, that at the moment when the ring was required Meyrick forgot that he had put it into the finger of his glove in order that he might remember where it was when called upon to produce it. It was found after some slight delay, so that we should hardly consider that a misfortune.

The Reverend the Vicar married the happy couple, and the breakfast passed with not more than the usual amount of weeping and bad speeches. Mr. Nesbitt, who had given away the bride, made a long oration, in which he recorded all the hardware virtues of the late Barnabas Vimpany. Frank Nesbitt proposed the health of the bridesmaids, and would insist upon calling Meyrick "a happy dog," and a "fortunate gdo," and harped upon the noun

canine until Meyrick fully expected Brutus to emerge from under the table. But Brutus was far away.

As the bride and bridegroom were being whirled off by rail to the great metropolis, Brutus was making his triumphant entry into Muddlesfield.

The Doctor was just mounting his horse to go off on his rounds, when he saw Nicholas come down the drive leading his old friend Brutus. But the Doctor never suspected the truth—he thought the dog belonged to Mr. Shorts, who was a sporting-looking character.

“What is it, my man?” said the Doctor.

“Oh! please, sir, Reverend Mr. Mountford, over to Beechworth, he have a-sent you over this here dog, as he says he can’t keep him no longer owing to his being that mischevus wi’ cats, and Mrs. Hem, as he have a-married her this very morning, have several favourite ones, which is not a thing as can agree.”

A good deal of this speech was Nicholas’s own, as may be supposed. The Doctor was annoyed beyond measure.

“Hang it all, when you give a man a dog and he keeps it ever so long, I’m dashed if I can see why-he should expect you to take it back when he gets tired of it. I don’t want the dog, my man.”

“No—nor no one don’t seem to. I don’t, and I was told to leave him here.”

“But, I won’t have him left here. I have as many dogs as I want—more too—already. I won’t have him left here.”

"I'm sorry for it, 'cos you see them's my orders and I must do 'em."

"I tell you I won't have him!"

"I'm not hard o' hearing," said Nicholas, stooping down and untying the cord round Brue's neck.

"Then don't leave him here!"

"You've spoke too late, sir," said Nicholas, as Brue, now liberated from the string and settling down at once in his old quarters, trotted off towards the stable-yard, where he expected to find Cæsar's store of bones, as of yore.

The Doctor saw it was useless to expostulate, so he got on his horse with the intention of going on his round. But Nicholas, touching his hat, interposed between him and the gate.

"Ax your pardon, sir, but it's a goodish step from Beechworth."

"I suppose you ought to know as you have walked from there."

"You won't mind giving a chap a glass of ale!"

"You be hanged—what! after all your insolence, and after your turning that beast loose here against my orders?"

"Well, you see, sir, a poor fellow's bound to obey his employers, sir, and I've had Reverend Mr. Hem's money, sir, which constitoots him my employer. I ain't had none from you, or it would constitute you too likewise, which I should then have much pleasure in obeying your orders, and am yours to command, for to take that there dog anywheres

else, even so far as to shoot him with my own hands, or otherwise do away with him."

"You're an impudent rascal, and you don't get a penny out of me. Stand aside!"

Nicholas stood aside, and the Doctor cantered out on his rounds. Mr. Shorts looked after him—not altogether unadmirably—and then made his way to the inn, where he converted sundry coin of the realm into potable liquor, and swallowed it until his gait became so unsteady that he went over twice the ground he need have done on his return journey to Beechworth, which he did not reach till late.

The Doctor's round took him past the field in which was situated the pond I have described in the opening chapter. As he rode by, he saw Cæsar, his splendid Newfoundland, with whom my readers are acquainted, standing in the pond, apparently watching something struggling in the water beneath him.

The Doctor whistled. Cæsar recognized the signal, looked round and wagged his tail, but did not attempt to move.

The Doctor whistled again. Still Cæsar only looked over his shoulder, wagged his tail, and stirred not.

A third whistle had no better effect, so the Doctor jumped off his horse, tied it to the gate, and walked across the fields to see what ailed Cæsar.

Let us in the meantime follow the fortunes of Brutus. As soon as he was released from the cord, that sagacious brute trotted off to the stable-yard.

He saw his old friend and victim, Cæsar, extended on the ground in front of his kennel; and close by Cæsar was a black cat.

After his failure in the case of Brutus, one would have expected Cæsar to set his face against adoption. But Cæsar was a dog, and not a man, so he was not disgusted by his want of success. He looked about for some sort of companion, and finally pitched upon a little black kitten that had been turned out of some cottage, and had strayed down the lane. At first Pussy resented his attentions, spitting and scratching outrageously. But Cæsar took it all very quietly until the kitten, finding no harm was intended, and discovering that all her scratches and snarls were perfectly useless, grew calm, and allowed herself to be made much of.

The attachment eventually became a very close and affectionate one. Smut—so the Doctor christened the kitten—slept in Cæsar's kennel, and basked with him in the sun, wandered with him through the fields, shared his meals, and found never-ending amusement in playing with his frisking tail.

When Brue arrived in the back yard this was the strange sight that met his gaze. Cæsar was reposing majestically in front of his kennel, watching Pussy's gambols with a pleased interest, which found expression in a gentle wag of his tail. And directly the tail wagged, pounce went Pussy at it, and was immediately knocked over by a second wag.

Brutus had always despised Cæsar, but his contempt now was beyond all expression. "He would put a stop to this nonsense!"

Away he went with an angry "gr-r-r-r!" towards the kennel. Pussy heard him, looked round, saw her danger, and leapt on the roof of the kennel.

She was barely in time, for as Brue took his last bound and snap, though he failed to seize her, he made the fur fly.

Before he could gather himself together for a jump on the kennel, Cæsar interfered. With a deep growl, like a very distant thunderclap, the big dog rose to his feet, and planting his fore paws on the astonished Brue, threw him on the ground. There he pinned him, despite his yells and bites, by the scruff of the neck.

His patience and long-suffering were worn out at last. He had saved the cur's life, and had borne with his insolence and impudence long enough; but when the unmannerly brute had the audacity to insult a lady, and that lady a special favourite and friend of Cæsar's, Cæsar felt it was time to give him a lesson.

Taking Brue by the scruff of the neck, he walked gravely up the stable-yard and across the lawn, jumped down into the field, and going down to the pond, thrust Brutus into the water, and held him down with his fore-paws until he was drowned.

When the Doctor came up to him, the act of summary justice was complete. Cæsar got out of the water, shook himself, and followed his master with the air of one who had done his duty.

And now you know the real story of Cæsar and Brutus, as it is *not* described in the history of Rome. But I am bound to add that Doctor Valentine, Frank Nesbitt, and even Meyrick Mountford, and I may even include the charming Zenobia, his wife, were not altogether unmoved by the circumstances of Brutus' death.

He was, it must be admitted, a dog with a bad disposition ; but you must remember the faults that more directly led to his sad end were those in which he had been encouraged by mankind.

"That, sir, is a very bad moral," says somebody.

I'm very glad of it, for I hate a story with a moral.



THE POOR-RATE.

By T. W. ROBERTSON.

THE POOR-RATE UNFOLDS A TALE.

"THE fact is, my poor dear old Daubray, you're spoons—case of true love—dead!"

"But what would you have me do?" spluttered Daubray.

"Do? get leave and cut away," was the reply.

"But I *have* got leave, and I *have* cut away—and while I was away I was miserable, and when I came back I was a gone-er coon than ever!"

"And do you mean to tell me, my dear old Dib"—Ensign Daubray was familiarly called Dib by his friends,—“do you mean to tell me that your passion is incurable?”

"Dashed if I know; I think so!" answered Daubray.

Captain Swynton lit a cigar, and there was a pause in the conversation. Captain Swynton then asked his friend what he meant to do, and there was another pause in the conversation.

"What do you mean to do, Dib?" repeated the captain.

"Dashed if I know," replied the puzzled ensign, "I don't know what to do."

"Of course, Dib, you're not such a soft as to think of marriage?" said the captain eyeing his friend keenly.

The ensign made no reply.

"That is quite out of the question," continued Swynton; "you know what your mother is."

Ensign Daubray sighed and nodded as if he knew what his mother was but too well.

Captain Swynton rose from his arm-chair, stirred the fire, and looking down upon his young friend like a benevolent Mephistopheles, said,

"Couldn't the thing be arranged?"

"Swynton," said Ensign Daubray, rising and helping himself to a cigar, "cut that."

"Look here, Dib, if you're going to mount a moral hobby, and ride—in an argumentative sense—to the Devil, I shall cut the discussion altogether. Either you are going to behave properly—with a proper regard to the world and all that you know—or you are going to do the other thing. Now the question is, which do you mean to do? The girl is a very nice girl. I've seen nicer, but still she *is* a nice girl—but as to your making her Mrs. Daubray—the thing won't hold water. All those marriages of people with common people are all very well in novels, and stories on the stage—because the real people don't exist, and have no relatives who exist, and no connections, and so no harm's done—and it's rather interesting—to look at; but in *real* life, with *real* social relations, and so on—real connections—and mothers, and so forth—it's absolutely"—

Captain Swynton described a circle with his cigar. "I don't pretend to be a particularly good fellow, or a particularly bad fellow; I suppose I'm a sort of average—regular standard kind of man—I'm not particularly worldly. I gave up the girl I was attached to—we'd neither of us any money—and I preferred that we should have enough and be apart, rather than be hard up together. You've heaps of money, but you can't marry a woman you can't present everywhere. Out of the question, Dib, and you know it. The world's the world, and you and I didn't make it—very good thing for the world we didn't."

Ensign Daubray took his hat, and after a long and searching contemplation of the lining, put it on his head.

"Going?" asked his friend.

"Yass."

"Where shall you dine?"

"Club."

"And after?"

"Theatre."

The captain hissed significantly as he sank into his chair.

"By the way," he said, "you'll lose your bet with Sydney."

"Why?"

"I met Thraxton yesterday, and he told me that war was certain."

"Bosh!"

"How so?"

"Too far off."

"What is?"

"Ruthshia. They'll do something at the Foreign Office; both sides will cry a go, and they'll throw up the sponge mutually; so I heard at the Club. Shan't pay till war's declared."

Saying which Ensign Daubray descended the staircase of Captain Swynton's lodgings in Mayfair, and walking to the nearest cab rank, took a Hansom.

"Westminster Bridge, t'other side, as fatht as you like," he ordered, and the cab rattled over the stones rapidly.

Ensign Daubray was twenty-three years of age; stood six feet two in his stockings, and in his saddle weighed over seventeen stone. He was of one of the first families in England. His father was dead, and his mother, who had been a great beauty, and was in her age hook-nosed, majestic, and terrible, had married a second time, and she ruled Lord Clarendon as tightly as she had ruled Fairfax Daubray. She was a haughty, irascible old woman, who knew no law but her own will, and whose pride of birth and family was French and pre-revolutionary French. Ensign Fairfax Daubray was a fine young fellow, high-hearted and broad-chested, single-minded, and straightforward, and not particularly bright. He had a vacant expression of face, which fact, joined to the possession of a tongue either too broad or too thick for his mouth, made him seem stupid. He was fond of field sports, had been reared to

regard his lady-mother with a superstitious sort of awe, and was a very quiet, well-disciplined young man.

Captain Swynton was Daubray's senior by about six years. There was a suspicion of trade in the family of the gallant captain, which he endeavoured to stifle by professing a contempt for commerce that would have been exaggerated in a duke. He was a sort of mild *roué* and amiable worldling, with a considerable capacity for misconduct, and a fair share of good nature and kind heartedness. He was never known to do anything exactly noble, nor had he been discovered in the execution of anything particularly mean. He expressed openly and with perfect sincerity, his regard for number one, and thought that all men should seize every opportunity for self-advancement. He was a good-tempered man about town, who would leave the society of a baronet for that of a lord, unless the baronet happened to be very rich and influential, would drop a viscount for a marquis, and the marquis for a duke. In whatever society he found himself, he invariably addressed his conversation to the most important person present, and was considered among his set a very nice, gentlemanlike fellow.

At Westminster Bridge Fairfax Daubray dismissed his cab, turned to the left, and walked till he came to Stangate. He paused before a house with a shrivelled shrub and some mangy grass between the lead-coloured wooden railings of the "front garden" and the door, and then opening the

gate gently, he tripped up some steps, and knocked a small double knock, quite a diminutive knock for so large a young man. Having committed himself thus far, Ensign Daubray fell to a persevering contemplation of his boots, and the colour ebbed and flowed about his temples, and the short fair hair in their immediate neighbourhood, with the regularity of the pendulum of a clock.

It was a dreary morning, and Stangate is a dreary neighbourhood, and has an air of general neglect and decay, as though the hand of Chancery were strong upon it. There is but little stir in Stangate. It is not a crowded mart or thoroughfare. Purveyors of cheap fish and damp cocks and hens are its most ordinary frequenters. The very children seemed depressed, and turn to the river side for excitement and fresh Thames air. Ensign Daubray's mother, Lady Clardonax, would have stared had she seen her son in such a place, with all the might of her dark eyes and purple *pince-nez*.

The door was opened by a young girl with black, shining hair and a pale face.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" she said; "I thought it was you."

And she laughed. Fairfax Daubray seemed to think it a good joke too, for he also laughed.

"May I come in?" he inquired.

"Of course you may; we are all at home."

The young man was ushered into a room where there were three more young ladies, all with dark shiny hair and large eyes; one was mending a pink

silk-socking, another was covering a tiny canvas shoe, and the third was recumbent on a dusky sofa, deep in a well-worn and unpleasant looking romance. The fair young hostess snatched a basin containing vegetables from the table, and disappeared with them, saying, as she returned—

“You mustn’t see what we have got for dinner, or you’ll be as wise as we are.”

“How do you all do?” asked Daubray, as he dropped into a chair.

“We are all quite well, and so is Polly,” said the first speaker.

Polly was the young lady mending the pink silk stocking, and her three sisters—for they were all sisters—looked at her as they spoke, and then looked at Ensign Daubray and smiled archly, and went on with their occupations.

Daubray sat near Polly, but did not address her personally. Polly was the eldest, the darkest eyed, and the prettiest of the sisters; demure, quiet, and self-possessed.

“What are you going to have for dinner, Jenny?” the young man asked.

“Find out,” was Miss Jenny’s reply. Jenny was the plainest of the sisters, and had acquired a sort of family celebrity for housekeeping and repartee.

“I wish you’d ask me to dine with you,” said the young soldier.

“Oh, no!” Jenny pursed her lips, and shook her head. “You’re too grand for us; you’d be

wanting two sorts of puddings, and all sorts of things."

"No I shouldn't," urged Daubray.

"Then you'd eat too much," said Jenny, at which the sisters laughed.

"No, I shouldn't. I'm moderation itself. I can eat anything," said Daubray, somewhat contradictorily.

Jenny shook her head again. "It's all very fine, Mr. Ferguson," she said, "but you don't dine here. What's the time?"

The sister covering the shoe, the sister reading the romance upon the sofa, Polly and Jenny, each produced from the bosoms of their jackets a gold watch.

"Half-past one," they all said in concert.

Daubray looked at Polly, drew a long breath, and asked, "What time?"

"Half-past one," answered Polly; and she smiled on him, and then lowered her large eyelids; and Daubray hitched his chair nearer to her; and the other sisters looked everywhere but at them, and pursued their avocations with an absorbing interest.

"Now, Sabina," began Jenny, sharply, "are you going to lie about reading that filthy book all day? And you, Cecilia, are you ever going to finish that shoe of mine? Do do something, there's dears."

At this signal the sisters Sabina and Cecilia rose and left the room, and Jenny laughed and said to

Daubray and Polly, "Now, you two, you can go on just as you like, for we shall be in the kitchen till dinner-time, and that's half-past two; then Polly must go out for a pink saucer." Jenny then hummed an operatic air, threw her arms gracefully from side to side, executed a *pas* from the Grand Divertissement des Bayaderes, and left the room laughing loudly.

Ensign Fairfax Daubray was desperately in love with Miss Polly Eccles, a fact which was known to everybody at the —— Theatre. Love had seized upon the young soldier as fiercely as fire seizes on a river-side wood-yard. The flame was so restless and so brilliant, that it was reflected around him, and about him, and above him and below him. He sighed like a furnace. He was in the habit of relieving his feelings by tipping the porter and the carpenters of the —— Theatre so liberally that they swore he was the gentlemanest gentleman they ever see, and that he came of a fine old stock, and understood how thirsty were the natural emotions of the working man. Daubray was a large man, and love raged over him like a benignant fever. He did not say much—indeed, his conversational powers were not extraordinary, but he looked smitten to the core. The thirsty carpenters called him "Miss Eccles's young gent," and Miss Eccles's comrades in the *corps de ballet* nicknamed him "Captain Spooney." The actors and actresses regarded him with a sort of sympathetic pity—for all of which Daubray cared not one strap-buckle.

When at the theatre, he saw neither the carpenters, nor the actors, nor the actresses, nor the gas, nor the scenery, nor the play, nor the farce, nor the green curtain—he only saw Polly. At the conclusion of the performance he was permitted to see Polly from the stage-door to her home, and to carry her small basket; her three sisters discreetly walked before. The young man passed the day contentedly, knowing that that half-hour of bliss must in time come round again.

During the run of the celebrated and magnificent melodramatic Eastern spectacle of “The Star of the Orient,” the part of Zuleika, the favourite of the Caliph, was personated by Mademoiselle Sara, from the Grand Opera, at Paris. The Sara who, it was said, had turned the heads of so many English and foreign noblemen, and other persons of distinction. The Sara did not act, she danced nightly before an indifferent Caliph and an enraptured audience. Humm, the manager, the successor to the late Mr. Loosefish and the celebrated Mr. Lowcadd, swore—that is swore literally—she was a great go, a cigar of the most enormous magnitude, and presented her, in the green-room with a bracelet, as he said, “as a trifling tribute of his deep sense and estimation of her professional talents, and private virtues.” To which fine speech Mademoiselle Sara replied that he was a droll, and then kissed him on both cheeks.

It was reported that Daubray had spent several hundred thousands of pounds upon “the Sara,” and

that he had the tenderest interest in her; the poor lad had never really cared for her, but had been led into her toils by his friends Captain Swyn-ton, old Lord Gasseleer, and Colonel Corcarmine. The Sara told him frankly that she liked him because he was young, because he was *bête*, because he was rich, and because he was English. "I like to conquer you, you English," she said to him; "and you must attend always by the side to aid my mantle."

It was when in attendance on this gorgeous creature, during the run of the "Star of the Orient," that Ensign Daubray first saw Polly Eccles. Mr. Lowcadd, the manager of the opposition establishment, had produced a rival spectacle and a rival dancer, and had, as Mr. Humm feelingly expressed it, "in the basest, most blackguard, and ungentlemanly manner, offered his ballet higher terms to go over to him." A number of the corps deserted Mr. Humm. Mr. Humm had to make fresh engagements, and among these engagements he was fortunate enough to secure the services of the Eccles family.

The history of the Eccles family was by no means singular or romantic. Of the pre-nuptial antecedents of Mr. and Mrs. Eccles, nothing is known. Mr. Eccles had been a mechanic of some sort or other. Mr. Eccles was either overproud, or possessed of mental attributes too high for his station in life—for he would not work. As all men of active minds must find some occupation to interest and amuse them, Mr. Eccles took to drinking—a

pursuit which he varied at tolerably regular intervals by beating his wife. The poor woman eked out a scanty livelihood by letting off a portion of the house in Stangate, and by her needle. She gladdened Mr. Eccles's home by four pledges of mutual affection—all of the female sex. While the fourth was still a nursling, Mrs. Eccles did the very best possible thing she could do under the circumstances—she died—leaving Mr. Eccles a disconsolate widower with four children.

The measure of Mr. Eccles's grief may be best judged by the copious means he took for banishing recollection. He wept tears whenever he alluded to his late wife, in the presence of a person of sympathetic mind and hospitable intentions. "Polly," sobbed and hiccupped Mr. Eccles, "my eldest gal, is now my only consolation—she takes after her poor mother, which is a comfort to me."

And Polly, who was barely nine years of age, took after her mother, and nursed her baby sister, and washed and combed her other little sisters, and waited on her father, and was abused and beaten by him. It was a horrid thing, as Mr. Eccles often remarked, to have ungrateful children.

The younger Eccleses flourished under Polly's maternal care; and a young Frenchman, a watch-maker, took a room in the house. This young Frenchman was visited by an older Frenchman—a thin, pale little man, who was a ballet-master at one of the large theatres on the other side of the water. The old Frenchman took a fancy to little Polly, and

seeing that she was pretty, well limbed, and graceful, asked her if she would join his class.

"When you shall be older," he said, "a young woman, you shall be able to get your living by dancing—or as I get mine—by teaching to dance."

Polly told him that her father could not afford to pay for her tuition, and the pale little Frenchman said that he did not require payment, but that he would teach her for nothing, because she was like a little lady he had known long years ago, and a long way off. And so Polly took lessons of the kind old ballet-master, and in her turn taught the lessons she learned of him to her two younger sisters; and every evening when Mr. Eccles was at the public-house, the three sisters used to dance, which not only interested and amused them, but interested and amused the baby in the cradle, who sat up and watched them.

Thus the Eccles family became part and parcel of the London *corps de ballet*. About the same time that Polly had acquired some proficiency in her art, her old patron the ballet-master left England for Vienna, and poor Polly remained a private fairy in the rank and file of the terpsichorean regiment.

No satisfactory reason has yet been discovered why two young people should fall in love. No special commission, or scientific inquiry, or metaphysical discussion has ever yet given to light those mysterious affinities that compel one young gentleman or lady, or a young lady or a young

gentleman, to ignore the rest of the world in favour of one person—to overlook eight hundred millions of inhabitants of this terrestrial globe for the sake of a single unit, because that single unit possesses a peculiar smile, or tone of voice, or an expression which, somehow or other, warms and gladdens, and melts the worldly surface, and liquefies the feelings of another unit. These unaccountable sympathies are more extraordinary than electricity, galvanism, earthquakes, aerolites, and spontaneous combustion, with which last mentioned phenomenon they have something in common. Ensign Fairfax Daubray must be excused for exhibiting a weakness which has been considered honourable in philosophers and statesmen, to say nothing of poets and warriors, who are supposed to be peculiarly susceptible to the influences of the tender passion. Love has been said to be a furious democrat, who flies about and levels all distinctions. He, she, or it, whichever love may be, would be better described as a mischievous aristocrat, who, kicked out of his, or her, or it's own sphere for misconduct, pervades the world, a beautiful incendiary—smouldering the hearts of rich and poor, and high and low, and finding pleasure in watching the agony, the joy, the flames, and smoke—and light and charred ashes, and hope and desolation, he, she, or it occasions. The only scion of the house of Daubray was wrong to fall in love with a young woman who earned eighteen shillings per week, and whose father was known as Sodden Sammy, for a mile round Astley's amphitheatre—but

he was hot-blooded and young—and it *was to be*. The Fates had declared that they should meet,—and had employed Mademoiselle Sara of the Grand Opera at Paris to negotiate with the liberal and enterprising impresario, Mr. Humm; Mr. Lowcadd, the other enterprising and liberal impresario, to quarrel with Mr. Humm and to produce a rival spectacle, and entice away Humm's ballet-dancers; Captain Swynton, Lord Gasseleer, and Colonel Corcarmine, to present the Ensign to the Sara. The remorseless ones, perhaps, even doomed Mrs. Eccles to an early death, and afflicted Mr. Eccles with a desire for drink, for the purpose of bringing them together.

Ensign Daubray was in attendance on the gorgeous Sara on the night that his fate cried out—and pronounced the dissyllable "Polly." Miss Mary Eccles was standing at the second wing on the opposite-prompt side of the stage of the — Theatre, attired in simple white, and carrying in her hand a long pink scarf, which in company with fifteen other young ladies, each carrying a long pink scarf, she was about to wreath around the celebrated *danseuse* from the Grand Opera at Paris. Their eyes met. Daubray experienced a pleasant momentary spasm, such as Paganini might have felt, if, after the very moment he discovered his power over the fourth string of his violin, that string had snapped. Miss Mary Eccles's gaze passed on to other objects—and the work was done.

"How are you, Sampray?" said the Ensign to an actor who, dressed in stage clothes for the farce,

was watching the dancers from the wing. "Who is that girl—there?"

"The one on the bank nearest us?"

"Yes."

"One of the Eccleses; the eldest—Poll."

Daubray's nerves were jarred by the monosyllable "Poll." He placidly asked, "Who is she?"

"Oh, in the ballet. She's got three sisters too."

"In the ballet too?"

"All in the ballet!"

"And here—I mean engaged here?"

"Every man Jack of 'em. Polly always takes them with her," was the reply. "There they are t'other side—up the stage. Clever girl, Polly—nice dancer; but the others keep her down. By Jove!" continued the comedian as he listened to a thunderous burst of applause, "Sara's hitting 'em to-night!"

Daubray first looked at Sara, and then at Polly; Sara in rainbow hues and diamonds, and Polly in white, with her hair in bands and her long eyelashes, contrasted as might a black-edged daisy with a tiger-lily.

The Ensign went to a splendid supper that night, with Gasseleer, Corcarmine, Swynton and friends, and Sara and friends; but the young man was *distract*, and did not seem to enjoy himself. His apparent apathy to the glories of the gay and festive scene was remarked on brilliantly by old Lord Gasseleer, who was extremely anxious to be

an amiable and gallant cavalier in the eyes of the Sara; and Sara herself laughed, and said, with an odd look, that she supposed he—Daubray—was in loaf.

“Old Gazzy wants to cut me out!” said the Ensign to Corcarmine on the following morning; “I wish he would!” a fact which Corcarmine mentioned to the noble lord, and Daubray’s wish was gratified.

The Sara having disappeared from the panorama of events, his next difficulty was to obtain an introduction to Polly. Not that one was needed. He knew perfectly well that Miss Eccles knew him to be Ensign Daubray, and believed him to be attached. He wished to be presented as a fresh, free man, and, to quote from his own mental soliloquy, “To begin all over again quite new, you know.” Luckily, though the “Star of the Orient” was withdrawn from the playbills, the Eccles family were retained on the establishment. Ensign Daubray sat in his rooms and abandoned himself to thought. How could he make friends with the Eccleses? He knew them to be retiring, bashful girls, and he wanted to know them on domestic familiar terms, and not merely to be able to nod to them. The gallant officer was slow at invention. On such a subject he could not ask his friends to put him up to a notion. He sat and pondered, but no notion came. He lit a cigar, but inspiration was not to be wooed by the most fragrant of havannahs. He dressed himself, and went out for a walk in the park, where his mind would be undisturbed by horseflesh; and on

his return stopped at a pastry-cook's, where he saw a stout woman and four fat children eating.

The sight of the stout woman and the four fat children eating suggested an expedient. Daubray entered the shop, and purchased some of the most expensive sweetmeats. These at night he gave to Cecilia, the smallest, youngest Eccles; from chatting with Cecilia, he was in time noticed by Sabina; after Sabina, Jenny very kindly nodded to him; and, at last, Polly spoke.

Behold, then, our Ensign thoroughly installed as the friend of the Eccles family, with honourable intentions towards the eldest sister. It was Daubray's particular request that the young ladies should call him "Dib," which they did; that is, all but Polly, who would never call her Fairfax Dib, but who afterwards invented the diminutive "Fax." The prattle of the girls over their tea—they seldom or never took dinner—was delightful to the young swell. He often enjoyed that refreshing beverage with them, and brought tarts for the consolation of the younger sisters. When he went over to Paris, he bought each of them a gold watch and chain, and the day of the presentation of those gold watches and chains was the happiest of the lives both of the Eccles sisters and the gallant Ensign. They were wonderful watches, they wound up so beautifully, they ticked so regularly, and they opened and shut with such delicious bran-new, first-hand snaps. As for the chains, they were indeed heavenly. Such workmanship, such weight! Solid

gold, too!—so bright, so yellow! The joy of their possession was only damped by the reflection that if their father saw them, he would assuredly make away with them. The watches, chains, and all were therefore kept a secret—in the most literal sense of the word—in the bosoms of the four sisters.

*same
word policy*

Ensign Daubray was naturally very much shocked at the first sight of Mr. Eccles, and it required all his love to make him remember that so damaged a parent was his Polly's misfortune and not her fault. Mr. Eccles was a dirty-looking old villain, with the flavour of last night's tap-room strong upon him. His address was unpleasing, fawning, and sham-propitiatory. Daubray saw the blackguard under his too civil, over-deferential manner, and wondered why for the sake of his own comfort he—Eccles—did not wash himself oftener. The girls considered their father a good average sort of parent; a little tipsified, but that they were used to; and certainly somewhat eccentric, which was proved by his frequent personal castigation of his daughters—Polly, as the oldest and most habituated, being his favourite for punishment; but a very clever man for all that, and who could have done wonders—had he liked.

The courting, walking home, and tea-making went on for more than a year, at which time the narrative commences; when Polly was promoted to the position of Columbine at the —— Theatre, of which she informed "Fax," who turned pale, and

said he'd be hanged if she should be Columbine, and that he had made up his mind.

Not two months after, Captain Swynton, who had long missed his friend from his accustomed haunts, met him on Westminster Bridge with a lady on his arm. The captain smiled and nodded, and would have passed on, had not Daubray stopped him.

"Swynton, how do you do?" said he, and then, lowering his voice, whispered, "I'm married!"

The captain's face assumed an odd, lowering expression, as if he would have said, "*You fool.*" But it changed immediately as he uttered, "I congratulate you!"

"My dear, Captain Swynton, Mrs. Fairfax Daubray. Come back and dine with us, will you? Five."

"Thanks, no, not to-day; I've an engagement—some other day I shall be——"

"Say Thursday. Will Thursday do, Polly? Yes, Thursday—by ourselves—you know."

"We shall be most happy to see Captain Swandown."

"Swynton, love."

"Swynton—I beg pardon," said Polly, thinking how much handsomer her "Fax" was than his friend.

Swynton accepted the invitation and strode off to Birdcage Walk, tapping his trousers vigorously with his cane. "Cheese and crust!" he said to himself; "what will the old lady say?"

They were very happy, the young pair, in their little cottage at Twickenham, and it was by the river side one darkling evening that the young wife whispered to her young husband that an heir or heiress to the house of Daubray might be soon expected.

"Let's walk quickly home, pet," said the anxious Fairfax, "for it is beginning to rain, and you might get wet."

Ensign Daubray's regiment was ordered to the Crimea. Lady Clardonax kissed her son's forehead, and pressed his hand as she told him that she was sure that he would do his duty.

"Dib," said Captain Swynton, as he met the ensign in Piccadilly, "you see you've lost your bet. Been to Lady Clardonax's?"

"Yes."

"Did you tell her?"

"About Polly—no!"

"What do you mean to do?"

"Not tell her at all," replied Daubray. "When I come back—if I come back—she'll be so glad she'll forgive me, and if I *don't* come back, why, it won't much matter."

"That's a very good notion," remarked Swynton.

"It wasn't mine. It was my wife's."

"How does she bear it?"

"What—the—my going? Oh, splendidly, *before me*. I'm afraid when I'm out there—she rather, you know—I've been to the agent's, and I think I'd rather leave a sum, and I haven't got much,

to be sure. She's going back to live with her sisters."

"What!" said Swynton, "do you mean to allow that?"

"She'll be so awful lonely when I'm gone; and you know there's a baby coming," said the poor fellow, apologetically. "It's a bad job, isn't it? and there's that little wife of Sergeant Dwyer's breaking her heart because he won't take her out with him. I don't think soldiers ought to marry. Orders do so cut up the women."

It was a terrible parting. Polly bore it as meekly as she could, but there are bounds to the endurance even of women; and Fairfax had to go upon his knees and implore her to keep calm for the sake of the little one not yet of this world. The bugles rang out and the drums rolled as Ensign Daubray took his place with his company; and as he marched past the Queen, his heart thumped, and he felt every inch a soldier. At the same moment his wife was lying insensible, with her three pale sisters hovering round her.

Fairfax Daubray was a brave, stupid, good-natured young man, and adored by the men under his command. A finer-hearted gentleman, or a more incapable officer never buckled on a sword-belt. He fought gallantly at Alma, and wrote after the battle. His wife, who was again in the little house in Stan-gate, read parts of his letter to her sisters, who cheered, and wept, and hurrahed as she read. She took them all with her to church upon the following Sunday.

It was in a hot skirmish that Ensign Daubray found himself in command of his company. His captain had been shot, and the lieutenant borne wounded to the rear. He saw the enemy above him. He knew that it was a soldier's duty to fight, and he led on his men up the hill-side.

"Dib, Dib, come back!" shouted two or three old officers from the main body of the troops behind him. Daubray turned round to them.

"*Come back be damned!*" answered he, waving his sword above his head; "*you fellows come on!*"

The next moment he fell pierced by three Russian bullets. The soldiers saw him fall, cheered, and rushed on. The Russians were in strong force, the odds, numerically, were six to one, but the English regiment cleared the hill-side.

Daubray was carried to the rear. The surgeon shook his head. The dying man raised his eyelids, looked at his friend Swynton with a look that said plainly, "Oh, if I could speak." His comrade pressed his hand, and, bending over him, put his lips close to his ear.

"Dib," he said, "can you hear me? do you understand me?"

Daubray nodded an assent.

"I know what you mean," continued Swynton. "I know what you would say—your wife."

Daubray smiled.

"Rely on me, I'll look after her, take care of her, and—and—your child!"

The wounded man smiled again, pressed his

friend's hand, sank back, and died, as the general of division galloped up, and said to a bleeding major—

“Beautiful ! beautiful ! Like men, by God !”

stupidity
A son and heir was born to the house of Daubray. The mother had hardly recovered when the fatal letter reached England ; but Jenny, when she saw that the address was not in the usual handwriting, guessed instantly at its contents. She opened and read it, and kept it from her sister for some days. When she heard the news, the widowed mother was prostrated for some weeks—afflictions seldom come alone. The last money received from the agent's had been entrusted to Mr. Eccles. Whether he had gambled or spent it was never known, but a balance of but a few poor pounds was found at the banker's, and over that Mr. Eccles had full power: he had banked it in his own name. A stormy scene ensued between father and daughter. Mrs. Daubray asked him if he wished to see his grandson starve? To which Mr. Eccles replied that after all he had done for her, the position he had raised her to, she was ungrateful, and hoped that she never might live to feel how sharper than a serpent's tooth was a thankless child. Mrs. Daubray thought of returning to the stage, but her sister Jenny would not hear of it. Mr. Eccles advised his daughter to apply to Major Daubray's friends, who would be sure to stand something handsome under the circumstances ; upon which, Mrs. Daubray desired him to hold his tongue.

Major Swynnton returned to England with one of

his coat sleeves empty. Almost his first call was on his comrade's widow. She told him of her pecuniary troubles, and he lent her money. He paid a visit to Lady Clardonax, and told her how her son died. The stern old lady's eyes moistened at the story, and she sprang from her chair and startled the major when he mentioned that he had left a wife and child.

"What?" she cried, "who was she? Some common person, of course?"

Major Swynton related the whole history.

"Major," said Lady Clardonax, "are you sure that they were married?"

The major laid the marriage certificate upon the table.

"And is *my grandson*," the old lady's voice faltered at the words, "with these wretched people?"

The major assented.

"He must not remain there. I'll get a nurse and have him here at once. What's the address? I'll go there at once?"

"Shall I accompany you?"

"No, I'll go by myself," replied Lady Clardonax, to the major's great relief; for brave among men, he was afraid of women in their wrath.

A carriage stood before the door of the little house in Stangate. Lady Clardonax introduced herself, and desired that her son's son might go back with her. Mrs. Daubray fired up and refused. The old grandmother was haughty and imperious;

the young mother, passionate and proud ; a violent altercation ensued, and Mrs. Daubray, in a flood of tears, desired Lady Clardonax to leave the house.

"Part with *him, my boy!*" she panted, "I'd sooner die!"

"You can see him when you wish to do so," said the lady.

"Better do what the good lady asks you, my dear," suggested the amiable Mr. Eccles, who was present, and desired to make himself agreeable to the owner of a carriage and pair ; "for sure she's advising you for your good, and for the child's likewise."

"My good creature," urged Lady Clardonax, "you surely cannot intend to bring up my son's son in a place like this?"

"It is a poor place," sighed Mr. Eccles, "and we are poor people, that's sure enough. We ought not to fly in the face of our pastors and masters, our pastresses and mistresses."

"Do hold your tongue!" said Jenny, who felt a strong inclination to assault both Lady Clardonax and her father at the same time.

"Master Fairfax Daubray," said Mrs. Daubray, hugging the infant who was serenely unconscious of the storm about him, "Master Fairfax Daubray will remain with his mother!"

"But you've no money. Fairfax's father and Fairfax himself so dipped the estate that it will be ten years before it is got round. How do you intend to live?" asked the old lady.

“Turn Columbine,” replied the themer; “go on the stage again and dance!”

This last speech was too much for Lady Clardonax, who beat a precipitate retreat; at the bottom of the stairs Mr. Eccles overtook her, and requested the loan of the sum of a sovereign until that day week.

“Go away,” said the old lady, as she stepped into her carriage and drove off.

But a Higher Power than that of a mother over her child had decreed that the infant was to be reared by Lady Clardonax. Mrs. Daubray fell ill, and her illness was past cure. Lady Clardonax, accompanied by Major Swynton, were received at the little house in Stangate by Jenny, who tearfully told them it would soon be all over, that her sister had been delirious, and had kept on saying that she was going away to see Fairfax to tell him about the child, and when they went into the sick-room the young mother hugged her baby and said—

“Take him, Lady Clardonax, and forgive me for what I said to you. I need not ask you to be kind to him, for I know you will for his sake! My darling! oh, my darling!”

“And so,” concluded the Tax Collector, “Major Swynton was the boy’s guardian, and old Lady Clardonax brought him up, and a real young swell

he is, and looks as proud as you please ; and as for the old lady, who, between ourselves, is an awful old devil generally, she doats upon that boy to that extent that she's a regular slave to him. When Lord Clardonax wants a thing done, he tells the boy, who tells his grandma, who has it done "too sweet," as the French say, for she thinks nothing too sweet for him.

"And what became of the other girls?" asked the Water-rate.

"They married—and so on."

"And the major?"

"Oh, he married his first love—as he found was a widow. He's been an altered man ever since he came back from the Crimea, very grave and serious, and all that ; don't seem to care about being so uppish."

"And what became of old Eccles?"

"Don't know," was the reply. "He went somewhere—to the bad, of course, in a general sort of way."



THE INCOME-TAX.

By W. S. GILBERT.

MAXWELL AND I.

CHAPTER I.

It was a dull Christmas night that Ted Maxwell and I were spending, boxed up in our chambers on a top-floor of Garden Court, Temple. Not but that we had plenty of friends in London who were keeping it up merrily that night—friends whose merriment was tempered by the fact that circumstances beyond our control required that we should spend the afternoon and evening in chamber solitude. But that Grand Fairy Christmas Extravaganza, *The One-eyed Calendars, Sons of Kings*; or, *Zobeide and the Three Great Black Dogs*, was due on the boards of a minor metropolitan theatre by ten o'clock on the following night, and there were two scenes still unfinished and three or four songs still unwritten.

For we were dramatic authors, Maxwell and I. Of course we were a great many other things besides, for dramatic authorship in England is but an unremunerative calling at the best of times; and Maxwell and I were mere beginners. We wrote for magazines, we were dramatic critics, we were the life and soul (such as they were) of London and provincial comic papers, we supplied "London Letters," crammed with exclusive political secrets,

and high-class aristocratic gossip, for credulous country journals; we wrote ballads for music publishers, and we did leaders and reviews for the weeklies. I had almost forgotten to add that we were barristers-at-law of the Inner Temple, Esquires, because that fact was only brought under our notice twice in the course of the year; once when the treasurer of the Inn applied to us for our term fees, and once when the Directories and Court Guides made ironical application to us for information concerning our titles, and country seats.

There had been an aggravating rehearsal, that morning, of our extravaganza. It was then discovered that a "carpenter's scene" must, absolutely, be introduced in order to allow time for the elaborate "set" with which the piece was to conclude. The last scene was, as a matter of course, unfinished; the chorus that opened the piece had not yet been written; and several "cuts" had to be made in our favourite scene. Moreover, the leading lady, Miss Patty de Montmorenci, had expressed her intention of ruining everything if she were not permitted to introduce the "*Miserere*" from the "*Trovatore*," after the comic duet between Mesrour and Zobeide; and Mr. Sam Travers, the leading low comedian, had insisted on our finding occasion for him to get over a brick-wall with glass on the top of it for him to stick in.

Three or four hours' incessant work enabled us to overcome these difficulties with greater or less success. The "carpenter's scene" was written

opened it a couple of women rushed violently past us into our sitting-room.

"Shut the door—don't stop to ask any questions—shut the door, I say!"

We closed it in mute astonishment. One of the women, the younger, had fallen on the hearthrug in a swoon; the elder was leaning against the mantelpiece, her head resting in her right hand and her left hand pressed to her side. Both were soaked with rain and splashed with slushy mud, but they appeared to be dressed in clothes of good quality, and made with some taste. The elder woman, as she stood against the mantelpiece, appeared to be about forty years of age, tall, thin, and, notwithstanding her pitiable condition, ladylike. The younger woman was evidently her daughter, and appeared, as well as we could judge as she lay crouched upon the hearthrug, to be about sixteen or eighteen years old.

"I beg your pardon for entering your rooms so unceremoniously," said the elder woman, as soon as she had recovered her breath. "If you will allow me to sit down for a few moments, I will explain all."

Maxwell placed her in a comfortable arm-chair near the fire, and then busied himself in getting out the brandy. I prepared, in a confused sort of way, to pick up the young girl who had fainted, and who, by this time, gave some evidence of returning consciousness. After two or three attempts, I contrived—rather clumsily, I am afraid—to get her on to the

sofa ; and by that time she had so far revived as to be able to express her thanks for the attention. I then saw that the estimate I had formed of her age was rather over than under the mark, for she was not more than fifteen, or sixteen at the utmost. She was very pale, and apparently in delicate health ; her features were pretty, without being strictly handsome ; and she had a quantity of light-yellow hair which fell in masses over her shoulders as I loosened the strings of her bonnet.

"Now," said Maxwell, as he placed a steaming tumbler of brandy and water before each of the women, "put that away, and then tell us all about it."

"I thank you very much," said the elder woman. "We ——"

"I'll not hear a word while there's a drop of brandy left in that tumbler. Drink it off directly."

But that was clearly impossible, for he had mixed it on the Jack-tar principle of "half-and-half." So on my representing this to him, he was pleased to pass a more lenient sentence, and to reduce the punishment, in each case, by one half.

"I am very grateful to you for your kindness," said the elder woman. "My daughter and I have fled from the violence of my infuriated husband, who but for your kindness would certainly have killed us."

"May I inquire the particulars ?" said he.

"My husband is a master mariner, and we

occupy a house in Essex Street, Strand, where I let apartments. He is a dreadfully violent man, and this evening he was brought home, after an absence of three days, by two policemen, quite drunk. He insisted upon having more drink as soon as they had left, and he gradually worked himself into a frenzy of excitement. It unfortunately happened that one of our lodgers left yesterday without paying his rent, and as soon as this fact came to his knowledge he flew into a violent rage, and struck me here," laying her hand upon her side. "He then seized a life-preserver, and, in an agony of terror, Emmie and I rushed into the street, with the intention of seeking shelter from his violence in my nephew's chambers, which are nearly opposite this house. In my excitement I could not find them for some time, and we wandered about the Temple for, I should think, a quarter of an hour, before we found Garden Court, and when at length we did find it, we discovered, to our great sorrow, that his chambers were closed, and a notice was posted on his door to the effect that he had gone out of town for a week. I heard my husband's voice in the immediate neighbourhood, and seeing only one window with a light in it (owing, I suppose, to its being Christmas-day), my daughter and I made our way to it as quickly as we could, and effected the uncereemonious entry for which we have to offer you our humblest apologies."

"If your story is true," said Maxwell " (and I see no reason to doubt it) you shall have an asylum

here until we can place you beyond the reach of your husband's violence. But you are wet through. How in the world are we to remedy that?"

"I have it," said I. "I'll run round to Mrs. Deeks, and get a change of some kind for these ladies."

Mrs. Deeks was one of that remarkable and much-abused class of women, the Temple laundresses. She was a pleasant, cheery little old woman, with a quiet chirruping voice, and so big a heart that you wondered how she could find room for it in her particularly little body. She had "done for" us during the three years that we had lived in the Temple, and had nursed me through two severe illnesses. She was our adviser in all circumstances of social difficulty, and the present embarrassment appeared to be, pre-eminently, a case for her interference. So Maxwell agreed that we could not do better than take counsel with her immediately; and I started off to lay the delicate circumstances of our case before her without a moment's delay.

I hurried through the half-melted slush and driving rain to Yates' Court, Clement's Inn, where the old lady lived. She was entertaining a select company of laundresses and their "good gentlemen," and seemed to be enjoying the gentility of her position as hostess so completely, that I felt that I was doing a brutal thing in interrupting her proceedings. It was a case of urgency, however, which could not wait, so I did not hesitate to lay the particulars before her, and claim her assistance.

The old lady had herself had some experience of conjugal existence under difficulties, for the late Mr. Deeks, of no occupation worth mentioning, was much given to knocking her down and dancing upon her, during the twenty years of their married life. His chief cause of complaint was that she was "much too good for him," and he appeared to think it especially hard upon him that she was so, for he was, to a certain extent, a conscientious man, and, as such, was constitutionally opposed to the practice of gratuitous maltreatment. But as acts of assault, deserved or otherwise, were as absolutely necessary to his enjoyment of existence as the bread and cheese he eat, he had, in the absence of any legitimate excuse, no resource but to exercise his physical attributes on her unoffending body. A merciful Providence, however, pitying his conscientious difficulties, had eventually removed him to a sphere in which he probably had no difficulty in meeting with congenial companionship. By virtue of her personal experiences with Mr. Deeks, and the fact that she had lived for many years in a neighbourhood where gentlemen of his stamp are common, she set herself up as a judge of bad husbands, and in that capacity entered, with considerable zest, into the study of the case I placed before her.

The old lady made up a bundle of dry clothes with all expedition, and, after apologizing to her guests, started off with me to the chambers. Our visitors were still drying themselves by the fire, and

overwhelmed me with their thanks when I entered with Mrs. Deeks. Maxwell and I then made a hollow feint of having important business in a man's chambers in the immediate neighbourhood, which would detain us half an hour or so, and left the two ladies and Mrs. Deeks to their devices.

It was still pouring with rain, so Maxwell and I sat on the bottom step of the staircase, and took counsel together.

"Now, Ted, my boy, what are we to do?"

"This," said Maxwell, who had a turn for stating cases, "is a case of peculiar delicacy. Here we have two bachelors in chambers, to whom, in the dead of night, enter two sopping females—one middle-aged and not otherwise remarkable; the other very young, and I think I may add interesting."

"Decidedly interesting," said I.

"And decidedly interesting. They come round with an account of themselves, which, on the one hand, may be as true as gospel, and, on the other, may be a story of a cock-and-a-bull."

"That's not likely," said I.

"I did not say it was likely. I am not dealing with probabilities, I am dealing with facts. Whether it is true or not, the fact remains that two sopping females have quartered themselves upon two dry bachelors."

"One dry bachelor and one wet one," was my rather captious amendment.

"Now don't interrupt me unnecessarily; they

were both quite dry when the women entered. The fact that one of them has since been out in the rain cannot be taken to act retrospectively. The two sopping females quartered themselves upon two dry bachelors."

"Be it so."

"The question then arises," said Maxwell, dropping the argumentative form in which he had opened the case, "what the devil are we to do?"

"Precisely. And what do you suggest?"

"There are three courses open to us: firstly, to allow these ladies to occupy our chambers until we can dispose of them satisfactorily, and get rooms at Sams' Hotel for ourselves; secondly, to allow them to occupy our chambers, and *not* get rooms at Sams' Hotel for ourselves—to occupy them conjointly, in short; and thirdly, to wash our hands of the whole affair, and, by placing the sopping ladies on the landing and once more sporting our oak, reduce the present complicated state of things to its normal simplicity."

I am bound, in justice to Maxwell, to admit that I believe that he placed this last course before me, simply that the beauty of his argument might not be impaired by the omission of any of its features. As he himself expressed it in reply to my expostulations, he did not suggest it as a prudent course—he simply threw it out for my consideration.

It did not take us long to determine that the first and second propositions alone demanded our serious attention.

"You see," said Maxwell, "you get two ladies and two gentlemen on the one hand, and a sitting-room and a double-bedded bed-room on the other. There is an utter want of proportion between the two groups, to say nothing of the fact that a cold and critical society is looking quietly on, eager to pounce upon and make the most of any step which is not characterized by the nicest discrimination."

"The upshot of all this would seem to be, that we had better let them occupy our rooms until to-morrow, and that the best thing we can do is to go and secure a couple of beds at Sams'."

"That is the conclusion to which I should have come in time, if you had allowed me to argue it out my own way," said Maxwell, rather pettishly; "but I suppose that we had better let our guests know what we propose to do, before we take any further steps in the matter."

So we went upstairs again, and finding from Mrs. Deeks that the ladies were in as presentable a condition as circumstances would permit, we walked in with the intention of obtaining their agreement to our suggestion.

They were sitting by a blazing fire, comfortably wrapped up in shawls and flannel petticoats, while the dresses they had taken off were steaming away on the backs of two chairs. There was a quiet, cozy look about the old chambers, which was partly due to the fact that Mrs. Deeks had laid a substantial supper, partly to the presence of the ladies themselves under circumstances which generated

mutual communicativeness, and partly to the contrast that the room afforded to the miserable splashing pavement which we had been contemplating for the last half hour. I daresay that the appearance presented by our visitors, muffled up as they were in Mrs. Deeks's under-clothing, would have been sufficiently ridiculous, if it were not that their pale appealing faces, thinned as they were by hard usage and insufficient food, their utter helplessness in our hands, and an exaggerated sense of the intrusion of which they had been guilty—an idea which seemed to overpower all other considerations, now that the excitement which prompted them to it had in some measure subsided—brought the pathetic side of their case so forcibly before us, that even Mrs. Deeks's flannel petticoats were glorified by their association with it.

We sat down to supper; Maxwell doing the host in a pleasant, cheery, country gentleman sort of way, intended to convey the impression that we were not at all taken aback by the events of the evening, and that, in point of fact, this sort of thing happened to us three times a week, or so.

"I beg your pardon," said Maxwell, "may I venture to ask whom I am addressing?"

"Talboys, sir—Mrs. Talboys; and this is my daughter, Emmie Talboys. I should have told you our names before, but, in the excitement of the events that brought us into your chambers, I forgot to do so."

"Pray don't mention it. I am Maxwell; my

friend here is Bailey—Bob Bailey; and now that we all know one another, I'll tell you, Mrs. Talboys, what we—that is, Bailey and I—propose to do. We propose to give up our chambers to you for the night—Mrs. Deeks will see to the necessary alterations—and to take up a temporary abode in an adjoining hostelry—at Sams's, in fact. Now, Mrs. Talboys, have you, or has Miss Talboys, any objection to urge to this arrangement?"

Mrs. Talboys was, of course, exceedingly and unnecessarily grateful to us for our hospitality, and as the only objection she could urge was the sorrow she should feel at putting us to so much trouble, the matter was soon decided, and Mrs. Deeks received instructions to make our room as suitable to the necessities of two ladies as circumstances would allow, while we finished our supper.

We soon became very pleasant and chatty together, a state of things for which, I believe, we were in no small measure indebted to the fact that tea formed one of the items in our repast, and that Mrs. Talboys presided at the tea-pot. There are no circumstances better calculated to make an Englishwoman look and feel thoroughly at home, under difficulties, than the sitting at the head of a table pouring out tea. It is a position that comes naturally to her, and she fits into it as a ball fits into a socket. She handles your tea-pot, and your milk-jug, and your sugar-basin, and your cups and saucers with an air of understanding their various relations, properties, and proportions, to which no

bachelor—or married man, for matter of that—was ever known to attain. It puts her on good terms with herself and her surroundings, and Maxwell and I agreed that tea in chambers, presided over by a lady, although in Mrs. Deeks's under-clothing, was as different a thing altogether to tea under bachelor circumstances as rum-punch to curds and whey.

Maxwell and I took our leave of Mrs. and Miss Talboys with as much ceremony as if they had been our hostesses and we their guests, and started off for Sams', which then stood opposite King's College. After passing an unsatisfactory night at that dingy establishment, we returned to our chambers to breakfast. Mrs. Talboys and her daughter had, it appeared, passed as comfortable a night as circumstances would permit, and, after a pleasant breakfast, we took further counsel with our *protégées* as to what was to be done.

It appeared, from Mrs. Talboys' statement, that her impulsive husband was expected to leave London for Melbourne the next day; so Maxwell and I determined that our course, as far as Mrs. Talboys and her daughter were concerned, was to afford them the protection of our chambers for another night; after which they would be enabled to return to their house without dread of further molestation. This arrangement appeared to set the mind of Mrs. Talboys comparatively at rest, and she overwhelmed us with expressions of gratitude. She expressed herself, however, with so much anxiety as to the condition of her husband, the lodgers, and

the furniture, after the *fracas*, that Maxwell and I determined to call at the house in Essex Street on our way to rehearsal, and, in the assumed character of intending lodgers, ascertain whether any harm had resulted to the establishment or its inmates, in consequence of the previous night's disturbance.

CHAPTER II.

THE rehearsal was called for eleven o'clock, and, as we had upwards of an hour to spare, Maxwell and I [made our way at once into the heart of Captain Talboys' social privacy. The house in Essex Street had all the appearance of a carelessly-conducted lodging-house. The windows were dirty, the blinds were drawn up awry, one of the area railings was broken, and the place generally conveyed an impression of insolvency, which the presence of a dusty canary in the parlour window did little to remove. The street-door was open, for a drabby girl of fourteen, in ragged brown stockings, was cleaning the steps, and a rusty cat sat by her side, looking up and down the street wistfully with an expression of countenance that seemed to say, "This is a very hopeless concern of ours; I wonder if there's an opening for me at number fifteen." That there was at least one inmate, however, whose spirits were not damped by this unsatisfactory state of things, was testified by a huge voice which came

rolling out at the open door, bearing upon it the *refrain* of some old-fashioned nautical song, and which ran, I think, as follows :—

“ Oh, Jenny, she cocked her eye at me,
A long time ago !
A long time ago, you lubber,
A long time ago, you lubber,
A long time ago ! ”

Maxwell and I listened for a few minutes, and eventually the singer stopped, and applause, as from a solitary tumbler, appeared to reward his efforts. We then asked the wretched servant girl, as a matter of form, if Mrs. Talboys were at home ?

“ No, sir, missis is jist gorn out, sir. Is it about the lodgins ? ”

“ Yes, it’s about the lodgings. ”

“ Master’s in, sir, ” said she. “ I’ll tell him, and p’raps he’ll show ’em. ”

The unhappy girl, who appeared to be suffering from a chronic cold, which she relieved from time to time on the back of the hearth-stone, gathered herself together, and limped into the dining-room, whence the sounds of revelry proceeded. She came out almost immediately, with a ducking, dodging action, as if something had been thrown at her, and told us to step in.

We obeyed her instructions, not without much misgiving, and passing two corded trunks, labelled “ Captain Talboys, ship ‘ Heart’s Content, ’ Limehouse Reach, ” which stood in the hall, we found ourselves in the presence of the carousers whose voices we

had heard in the street. One, evidently Captain Talboys, was a big, muscular, hairy sailor, with a low square brow, a bull neck, great brown hands, and shoulders of enormous breadth. His coat was off, and was lying on a chair hard by. He wore square-cut black trousers, a black satin waistcoat, and thick square-toed Wellington boots. His companion was a small, unwholesome-looking, fat Jew, with a pasty complexion, black moustache and whiskers, a massive gold chain, and several thick rings on his dirty squabby fingers.

"Come in, shipmet," said Captain Talboys, in a thick husky voice, "come in; and what'll yer take? Here's brandy, rum, whiskey, gin, anything. Help yourself, shipmet! Yo ho! help yourself!"

"Thank you, I don't think we'll drink anything," said I, as I stumbled over the coal-scoop, which appeared to have been the missile with which the announcement of our appearance by the drabby servant was greeted. "We have come about some apartments which you advertise in your window."

"Here, you gal!" shouted Captain Talboys.

The drabby girl made her appearance at the door.

"'Partments. Take 'em up," was the brief form of words in which he explained the object of our visit to the servant.

The fat Jew had been staring alternately at Maxwell and at me rather anxiously for a minute or two, and just as we turned to leave the room he said, "Beg pardon, gents, but I think I'm speaking to Messrs. Maxwell and Bailey, ain't I?"

We had determined upon two imaginary names, which we had arranged to give if any names had been demanded of us; but as the small Jew appeared to know us, we were fain to admit the truth of his assertion.

"I thort so. Here, captin, these gents is Maxwell and Bailey, the dramatic horthers. You've 'eard on 'em, captin; don't say yer ain't 'eard on 'em! Saw that farce o' yourn, 'Up in the World,' last night, gents. Best thing eversornalmilife! best thing eversornalmilife! You know, captin; farce last night—chap up the chimney—you know!"

"Oh, ah!" said the captain, "*I* know fast enough."

"Very 'appy to make your acquaintance, gents. I'm Mister Abraham Levy, of the Parnassus Music Hall; p'raps you may have 'eard on me. Any night you like to look in upon me, your card's quite sufficient, gents; either on you, or any friends o' yourn."

I said some matter of course words, to the effect that I should be delighted, I was sure.

"By the way, p'raps we can do some bisness together; who knows? Yer 'aven't got anythink in the comic duologue line on yer hands, 'ave yer? Somethin' that 'ud suit my Bob Saunders and little Clara Mandeville, you know. You know the sort o' thing I mean."

Maxwell and I regretted that we had nothing on hand that would be likely to suit him. An impatient growl from Captain Talboys warned us that

he considered that the audience had lasted quite long enough; so we beat a rapid retreat, and proceeded, in company with the drabby servant, to go through the hollow form of inspecting the apartments.

I am sorry to say, that the rooms to which our attention was principally directed were at that moment in process of being vacated by a gentleman, who had given notice of his intention to quit on the preceding evening, immediately after, and in consequence of, the disturbance between Captain Talboys and his unhappy wife. There was only one other lodger, an undesirable Irish tenant, whom Mrs. Talboys had made repeated but fruitless efforts in the course of the last six months to get rid of.

We mumbled out something to the servant about returning to-morrow, and giving a definitive answer, and then made the best of our way to the theatre. The rehearsal was unsatisfactory; no one was perfect, or anything like it; properties had to be made, music to be scored and learnt, and comic dances to be decided on. At two o'clock we were all cleared off, that the rest of the afternoon might be devoted to a rehearsal of the last scene—a complicated absurdity, that took ten minutes to develop, and looked eventually more like a gorgeous valentine than anything I ever saw. The stereotyped assurance that everybody gave us, that “it would be all right at night,” afforded us but little consolation, for we had often heard it before, in

cases where it was very far indeed from being all right at night. So we returned to the Temple in evil spirits.

We gave Mrs. Talboys and her daughter an account of Captain Talboys' then condition, and we told her of the first floor's indignant departure. I am afraid that the result of our mission did little in the way of raising her spirits. The fact, however, that the captain's luggage was prepared for sea revived her a little; and it was settled that, if, on our calling the next day, we found that he had joined his ship, Mrs. Talboys and her daughter were to return home. As the day wore on, our respective spirits revived; and after a pleasant make-shift dinner, which we ordered in from the "Cock," we began to look upon our respective prospects with more hopeful eyes. We had a piano in the chambers, and Emmie Talboys sang some simple old English ballads with a delightful untutored pathos which was inexpressibly charming. Maxwell, who had a fine baritone voice, also employed it to the best advantage; and so with songs and quiet chat we passed the afternoon and evening, until it was time for us to go to the theatre. We left the two ladies in possession of our chambers, and, after securing our bed-rooms at Sams', we betook ourselves to the first representation of the Grand Fairy Extravaganza of "The One-Eyed Calendars, Sons of Kings; or, Zobeide and the Three Great Black Dogs."

My private impression of the "One-Eyed Ca-

lendars" is that it was irreclaimable nonsense; but, as every one had the necessary number of verbal contortions to deliver, and as every song was followed up by a nigger "break-down," and as the management had combined the *maximum* of (stage) beauty with the *minimum* of petticoat, it was practically a great success. The authors were honoured with the customary "call," and the papers on the ensuing day indorsed (as they usually do) the opinions expressed by the audience. It is true that our satisfaction at the favourable character of the notices was somewhat damped by finding ourselves invariably alluded to as "those twin sons of Momus;" but, on the whole, we had no reason to complain of the manner in which we were treated.

The next day, on my inquiring in Essex Street, I found that Captain Talboys, his Jew friend, and the two big boxes had taken themselves off. The drabby servant was in a terrible state of mind at the non-appearance of her mistress, who (she now told me) had been absent with Miss Emmie ever since Christmas-eve. "She was a good missis to her," she said, "and so was Miss Emmie, right good; and she'd go right off to the pleece and have them looked for, if she'd only some one to mind the house for a quarter of an hour." But the woman who usually came to cook had been drunk ever since Christmas-day, and she was at her wits' ends to know what to do. And the poor little drab, who had made many guppy attempts to keep the tears down (for she was a brave little drab), fairly gave

way, as her responsibilities stood forth in all their naked magnitude before her, and cried away as if her heart would break.

Maxwell and I made the best of our way back to the Temple, and placed the facts of the little servant's anxiety and helplessness so vividly before Mrs. Talboys and Emmie that they lost no time in putting on their bonnets and returning to Essex Street, after thanking us most emphatically for our kindness and hospitality. She sincerely hoped that we would kindly call on her from time to time; Emmie and she were always at home in the evening, and they would be most happy if when we had an evening to spare we would spend it with them.

* * * * *

By degrees Maxwell and I became very intimate with Mrs. Talboys, and we took an interest in assisting her with our counsel, whenever she found herself entangled in a social difficulty with which she was unable to grapple single-handed. For I am afraid that no course of training under the sun could possibly have made a good manager of Mrs. Talboys. She was a mild, weak, good-hearted, unsystematic woman, who was as unfit to manage a London lodging-house as Maxwell and I were to command a man-of-war. A very short experience of the nature of the difficulties with which the poor lady was surrounded, convinced us that she was more or less the dupe of almost every one with whom she had dealings. We contrived, in course of time, to establish a system of check upon her

lodgers and her tradespeople, we lent her a little money to enable her to make a few indispensable additions to her stock of furniture, and we procured her a tenant for her drawing-room floor. In a couple of months after Captain Talboys' departure, matters had so far improved that Mrs. Talboys was in a position to substitute a permanent cook for the intermittent functionary who had hitherto been in the habit of looking in from time to time to ascertain whether her services were required.

We passed a great many very pleasant evenings with the Talboys, to the enjoyment of which little Emmie's unpretending musical powers contributed in no slight degree. I have not dwelt at any length on Emmie Talboys' appearance and characteristics, for, when I first knew her, she did not make any very decided impression on me. She had a quiet, retiring, unassuming way with her, that appeared rather to shun observation than to court it; and, at first, her extreme nervousness made us feel that the ordinary matter-of-course attentions which we should have paid to any other young lady, would have frightened the poor little woman out of her senses. But as she came to know us more intimately, her extreme shyness wore off, and we found beneath it a sweetness of disposition, combined with a simple unaffected pleasure in our society, which to me was irresistibly charming. She was not absolutely pretty, but her big blue eyes, her thick yellow hair, and the bright smile with which she welcomed us when she came to know us well;

stood her in good stead of the advantages which mere regularity of feature would have conferred upon her. I am afraid that I must own that before I had known the little woman for many weeks, I fell desperately in love with her. As I have already implied, it took some little time to bring this about; for her beauties of disposition broke upon one so gradually and so unobtrusively, that to have fallen in love with her at first sight would have implied the possession of a discrimination of character to which I lay no claim.

They were very pleasant evenings, those that Maxwell and I spent with the Talboys. Maxwell, I think, enjoyed them almost as much as I did. He was not a man who was given to falling easily in love, and, although he was about my own age—that is to say, eight-and-twenty, or thereabouts—he had a fatherly protecting way of treating little Emmie Talboys that was really very amusing. He looked upon her as a mere child, and bought playthings and sweetmeats without number for her. He had no hesitation in calling her by her Christian name, as soon as he knew what it was; and his elderly didactic manner caused her to look upon his doing so as a matter of course. We used to sit by the firelight on the long winter evenings, and Mrs. Talboys would take counsel with Maxwell on such points of domestic economy as had turned up to perplex her during the day, while I sat by the battered old piano, and listened to little Emmie's pure and gentle voice, as she sang "On the Banks

of Allan Water," "The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington," or some other simple plaintive ballad which lay within the compass of her unpretending powers. Maxwell and I used often to take them to the theatre, to which we had no difficulty in obtaining free admission; and it was refreshing to a couple of battered theatrical hacks like ourselves, who had seen every piece that had been produced in London during the previous ten years or so, to witness the childish interest that the little woman took even in the common-place hackneyed incidents of the wretched farce that played the audience out. At other times, Mrs. Talboys and Emmie would spend the evening with us at our chambers; on which occasions we would ask Paulby of the Home Circuit, O'Byrne of the "Advertiser," and one or two other fellow-Templars, to drop in; and then we always wound up the proceedings with an oyster or lobster banquet from Prosser's. We always gave out that Mrs. Talboys was the wife of Captain Talboys (impliedly of the Royal Navy), now at sea; concerning whose health and prosperity, by the by, O'Byrne invariably made well-meant but most awkward inquiries of Mrs. Talboys whenever he met her.

This sort of thing went on for about twelve months. The more I saw of little Emmie Talboys, the more desperately I loved her. I don't think I ever hinted to the little woman in the most remote manner at the existence of this attachment, but I cannot suppose that she was ignorant of it. In

point of fact, I am sure that it was remarked by Mrs. Talboys, and I am equally sure that she placed no impediment in the way of our being together. I had almost made up my mind to speak openly to Emmie, when an event occurred which upset all my plans.

One morning (it was in the January twelve-month after our first meeting with the Talboys) Maxwell and I returned to London after a fortnight's absence in Liverpool, where we had been to superintend the production of a Christmas piece. Among the letters that awaited us was one addressed to Maxwell from Mrs. Talboys, with a date a week old. He opened it, read it, and handed it to me. It was to the following effect :—

“ESSEX STREET, 30th Dec.

“MY DEAR MR. MAXWELL,—I have grievous news to tell you of myself. My husband contracted a great many debts before he left England, and as he has not been heard of for twelve months, his creditors have become most impatient. You will be distressed to hear that all my furniture has been seized under a bill of sale, that my tenants have been obliged to leave the house in consequence, and that Emmie and I are absolutely ruined. We start for Chester to-day—we used to have friends there, who may still remember us, and place us in the way of earning a respectable living ; God only knows what is to become of us if they should fail. Forgive me, dear Mr. Maxwell, for taking this course with-

out consulting you or Mr. Bailey. After your exceeding kindness to me and mine, I am afraid that you will think that I am acting most ungratefully in thus leaving London without speaking to you on the subject. But, when I tell you that I do so because I know that your generous nature would have prompted you to offer me further assistance if I had placed our case before you, I am sure that you will both see that I could not, with propriety, have acted otherwise than as I have done. If my husband should return soon, my present difficulties may be got over, for he will receive a large sum of money on his arrival; but in the meantime, Emmie and I must do our best to earn a living by ourselves. Trusting that a very short time will elapse before we meet again, and with the deepest gratitude to both of you, for your extreme and, to me, unaccountable kindness, believe me to be, my dear Mr. Maxwell, ever yours most thankfully,

“EMILY TALBOYS.”

We were thunderstruck at the contents of the letter: in point of fact, I had to read it two or three times before I could grasp its contents. Some minutes elapsed before either of us spoke. I sank on my arm-chair, completely overwhelmed at the misfortune that had happened to them and to me. At length Maxwell broke the silence.

“We must take steps to find them instantly!”

“But what, in heaven’s name, can we do?”
said I.

“Advertise; we will also write to the Post-office at Chester—it is not improbable that they will think it likely that we have written there, and will make inquiries accordingly.”

“But they don’t want to hear from us.”

“Yes they do. Besides, if a woman knows, or believes that a letter is waiting for her at a post-office, she will go and apply for it, whether she wishes to hear from the writer or not.”

Maxwell had an intellectual pinnacle of his own, from which he looked down upon woman and her ways. From some cause or other (perhaps owing to its giddy height), it appeared to be unfavourable to minute examination; at all events, woman at large was one of those topics of discussion upon which Maxwell and I seldom agreed. However, I was only too glad to catch at the small crumb of comfort that he offered me, and I agreed that there might be something in that, too.

We hurried off to the house in Essex Street. It was empty, and a torn advertisement pasted near the door, together with the litter and straw on the steps and in the road, spoke of the recent sale. A notice, to the effect that the eligible premises (adapted for a lodging-house) were to let, and that application might be made to the housekeeper within, or to Messrs. Puddick and Crowby, auctioneers and estate agents, in Catherine Street, Strand, adorned the parlour window.

We made application to the housekeeper, as advised, believing that she would be more likely to

give us information about Mrs. Talboys' movements than Messrs. Puddick and Crowby. However, she turned out to be a sodden old lady, who knew nothing more of Mrs. Talboys, except that she was a precious bad lot, as ought to be rope-ended if all on us had their jew. No, she didn't know nothing about no addresses—Mrs. T. took precious good care as nobody should—and for a good reason, too.

We left this impracticable old female, in depressed spirits, and turned our attention to Chester generally. We sent carefully worded advertisements to the "Times," and to the Chester papers; and Maxwell wrote a long letter to Mrs. Talboys, Post-office, Chester, begging her to afford us some information as to her proposed movements, if she objected to telling us her address.

Day after day elapsed, but no letter came to us from Mrs. Talboys. I will not attempt to paint my intense grief at losing my little Emmie. Suffice it to say, that, after six weeks' interval of mental depression, which seriously affected my powers as a writer of light literature, I began to recover my usual spirits, and, excepting that I could never make up my mind to leave the Temple at the Essex Gate, or to look down Essex Street as I passed it in the Strand, matters went on pretty well as they did before the events of which these chapters have told.

CHAPTER III.

Two years had elapsed since the disappearance of Mrs. Talboys and little Emmie. During that time neither Maxwell nor I had heard anything of either of them, and I am afraid I must own that they had both so completely faded from our thoughts, that with the exception of an occasional "Wonder what's become of the Talboys?" they were hardly ever alluded to by either of us.

Time had not treated us particularly well. We had long ago attained that well-known five pounds a week that so many writers of light literature attain, and so few go beyond, and at an average of five pounds a week our income steadily remained. Not so, however, our expenditure. I am bound in honour to state that Maxwell and I were both inconveniently in debt. We were not men of decidedly extravagant habits, but each of us had his hobbies, and a hobby-horse is the most expensive riding that a beggar can indulge in. In our cases, our respective hobbies carried us considerably beyond the constable, and we were obliged to accept all sorts of work to enable us to keep our enemies at bay.

One morning, as Maxwell and I set to work, in extreme ill-humour, to complete a series of "Drawing-Room Comic Songs," which we were doing for a cheap music publisher, at a guinea per song, we were interrupted by a single knock, which Maxwell

rose, impatiently, to answer. He opened the door and found a flabby, shabby-genteel man in rusty black, waiting on the landing—

“Mr. Bailey, sir?”

“No—Maxwell.”

“That will do, sir—I have come——”

“I know. It’s steel pens—I don’t want any.”

“No, sir, it’s not steel pens——”

“Then it’s ketchup. Be off!”

“No, and it isn’t ketchup neither,” said our visitor, with an impatient air of injury. “A letter, wait for answer.”

And, so saying, he put a dirty thumby envelope into Maxwell’s hands. He opened it and read as follows :—

“PARNASSUS, OXFORD STREET, *April 4th*, 1863.

“DEAR SIR,—I am in want of a short doalog for two people—self and wife—with songs. Something short and smart, to play twenty minutes or thereabouts, with practical fun, such as suits my audience. My terms for such is a ten-pound note, and if either of you got anything to suit, shall be glad. Must have it by the 6th, as we open with it on the 7th. Please send answer by bearer, and beg to remain, yours, etc.,

ABRAHAM LEVY.”

Owing to the fact that the demands for light farce had not kept pace with our literary fecundity in that respect, we had a good deal more theatrical capital lying idle on our hands than we had at the

time when we first made Mr. Levy's acquaintance at Captain Talboys'. So we sent an answer by the seedy messenger, to the effect that we had something that would doubtless suit the requirements of a Parnassus audience, and would look in upon Mr. Levy that evening, and talk the matter over with him.

That afternoon, however, we were favoured with a visit from Mr. Levy, who, having occasion to call at his solicitor's in Clement's Inn, to instruct him to defend an action brought by the Dramatic Authors' Society for an infraction of copyright, availed himself of the fact of his being in our neighbourhood, to look in upon us and arrange preliminaries.

We submitted our plot to Mr. Levy. A lady and gentleman, of high rank, who had been betrothed in early infancy (as is customary in the best English families), but who had taken the deepest aversion to each other, owing to the fact that the gentleman was said to possess an inordinate and unnatural passion for baked sheep's head—a dish which the lady held in proper aristocratic abhorrence—and that the lady was never happy unless she was devouring onions—a vegetable for which the gentleman entertained feelings of the profoundest disgust—meet unexpectedly in the centre of the maze at Hampton Court. The mutual embarrassment and annoyance caused by this most awkward *rencontre*, is enhanced by the fact that, owing to the ingenious disposition of the labyrinth, neither of them is able to find a

way out of it. Thus thrown together by a fate with which it is impossible to contend, they determine to put up with each other's society as best they may. The limited area at their disposal is divided into two equal parts by an imaginary line, and each undertakes to keep religiously to his or her own territory until such time as somebody shall appear who can give them a clue to the way out of the perplexing labyrinth. The lady thinks she cannot do better than employ her enforced leisure by singing some of the favourite ballads of her early infancy, and the gentleman (whose tastes are more material) proceeds to devote himself to the lunch which he has brought with him in a basket. The lady's attention is arrested by his announced intention to lunch, and in an agony of dread, at the anticipated appearance of the detested dish, implores him (in a parody on "*Robert, toi que j'aime*") to postpone his meal until she can escape from the maze. In a comic duet (a community of proceeding not forbidden by the terms of their treaty), he declines to entertain her suggestion, and proceeds to lunch off—not a sheep's head, but a magnificent *pâté de foie gras* (crust and all, as it eventually turned out). The whole truth flashes upon her in a moment. A wicked marquis, who seeks her hand, has spread the detestable calumny which has caused her detestation for her betrothed lover! She rushes to his arms and embraces him, and the gentleman, as soon as he has recovered from the astonishment with which this proceeding not unnaturally strikes him, is amazed and delighted to discover that

the lady's breath is not polluted by the flavour of onion! He at once perceives that a wealthy (but hideous) duchess who adores him is the author of the abominable rumour that has estranged him from his beloved—an explanation ensues, and matters end as happily as a comic duet can make them.

Mr. Levy was delighted with the plot, and after suggesting that the gentleman must accidentally sit upon the pie, and put a fork or two into his pocket, and by otherwise misconducting himself contribute to the practical fun of the piece, and impressing upon us that we must on no account go in for "comedy dialogue," he took his departure. The duologue was duly finished, christened, "Love in a Maze," and sent in. By the next post we received a cheque for ten guineas on Messrs. Glyn, Mills, and Co.

The ensuing morning, as we sat at breakfast, Maxwell, who had been amusing himself with the "Times" supplement, suddenly sprang to his feet, exclaiming,

"By Jove! here's something about the Talboys!" and he handed me the paper, pointing to an advertisement that ran as follows:—

"**TALBOYS OR TALBOT.**—If this advertisement should meet the eye of Mrs. Emily Talboys or Talbot, widow of the late Esau Talboys or Talbot, master mariner, who died in Australia on the 14th or 18th of November last, and late of Essex Street, Strand, she is requested to send her address to Tenby and Campbell, solicitors, Brabant Court, London. Any person who

can furnish such a clue to the present residence of Mrs. Talboys or Talbot, as shall lead to her discovery, shall receive a reward of Ten Pounds."

We bolted our breakfast and hurried, as fast as a Hansom could carry us, to Brabant Court. Of course we could give no information as to her whereabouts, but on giving our cards, and informing Messrs. Tenby and Campbell that we were intimate friends of the Talboys', they were good enough to tell us that Captain Talboys reached Melbourne in safety, and that he had shortly afterwards made his way to the diggings, where, after several weeks' labour, he had made a "find" of surpassing magnitude, that he had returned to Melbourne, that he fell overboard as he went up the ship's side in a state of intoxication, that he was drowned, and that his widow was entitled to a sum of seventeen thousand five hundred and sixty-four pounds—the net proceeds of his labour in the gold-fields. They further told us that the news only reached them the previous day, and that no clue had as yet been afforded as to their present address.

We left the office in good spirits, for the hope that we should eventually hear something of Mrs. Talboys and Emmie had revived within us. As we were in the City we made our way to Messrs. Glyn, Mills, and Co., with the view of getting Levy's cheque cashed, for that gentleman's reputation as a paymaster was not so unimpeachable as to warrant our looking upon his cheque as a negotiable security of a wholly unquestionable character. Ac-

cordingly, we were not altogether surprised to find it returned to us dishonoured, with the announcement that Mr. Levy had already considerably overdrawn his account, and that no further advance would be made to him. So, as we were particularly insolvent at that moment, Maxwell and I repaired the same evening to the Parnassus Music Hall, with the view of inducing him to substitute a cash payment for his worthless cheque.

Mr. Levy was all apology. He had paid a large sum of money in yesterday, and found himself unexpectedly compelled to draw it that morning. But if we would take a seat in his private room, he would see if a sufficient sum of money had been taken at the doors to enable him to settle our claim.

On inquiring he found that up to that time (nine o'clock) only five pounds and some odd shillings had been received, but if we would sit down and make ourselves comfortable, he had no doubt but that he should be able to square it up in half an hour or so. We were fain to agree to this, and placing a bottle of whiskey and some cigars, in a tumbler, before us, he left us to attend to his duties.

Mr. Levy's private room was situated at the extreme end of the Parnassus, and as the glass door commanded the stage, we amused ourselves by watching the performance until such time as ten pounds should have been taken at the doors.

The principal element of entertainment at the Parnassus Music Hall was comic singing. A stout man, who looked like a churchwarden out of luck,

occupied the platform as we entered, and sang a series of dismal comic songs, "all of his own composition, sir!" as a waiter informed me.

"I'm told, sir," added my informant, "that that gent is always a writin' songs in his 'ed. - To look at him as he walks through the 'all, talkin' affable to a gent here and a gent there, and a smokin' with this one and a drinking with that, you'd little think that all the time he was a composin' the verses as he sings five minutes after on the platform. But he is, sir—rhymes and all!"

We listened with increased interest to the singer after this description of his peculiarities. He was extremely political, and was very hard upon Lord Derby, and very patronizing indeed, when he had occasion to allude to the Royal Family—every member of which appeared to enjoy, *ex officio*, the advantage of his protection and encouragement—which was the more remarkable as he was for upsetting every other constituted authority. He touched upon the American differences, and having demolished the North at a blow, proceeded to clap General Garibaldi on the back, annihilate the police system, and to tell us that we had a great many more bishops than was good for us. He was vociferously encored (my friend, the waiter, going into ecstasies over him), and he obligingly favoured us with another of his composition, in which he advised us on no account to pay any taxes, and recommended Britons generally to go in for their rights, which he described as,

“ A pipe, my brother ; a bowl, my brother,
A maiden fair, of a beauty rare,
To comfort your jolly old soul, my brother :
Sing, cheerily Ho ! sing ho ! ”

Then a terrible woman with big bones, a raw brazen voice, and her hair parted at the side, came on to the stage and screamed, and roared, and slapped her hands, and danced, and then sang again, and then danced and slapped and banged herself once more, which was her energetic way of advising you, under all circumstances of life, to “ Speak up like a ma-a-n ! ” And then we had a fiddler who could play over a chair and under a chair, and through a chair, and on his head, and with his head between his legs, and under all circumstances of contortion under which a man could reasonably be expected to fiddle. The fiddler was followed by two Bounding Brothers, who, at first, were so mutually polite (as they bounded about the stage) that you would think they had only just been introduced to each other ; but when (in the course of the performance) they came to know one another better, you found that the elder brother was haughty, for he repelled the ingenuous advances of the younger brother by turning him head over heels in the air. But the younger brother’s fraternal love was too strong to be at all affected by these repulses, although as often as he ran up to embrace the elder brother, he was turned about by his unnatural relative in a distressing manner. Eventually the elder brother began to lose his temper, and seizing the younger

brother by the middle, twirled him violently round and round, and eventually threw him over his head, standing over him (as he came down) in a threatening attitude which there was no mistaking. The younger brother, who began to feel that matters were getting desperate, fell on his knees and prayed. The elder brother is softened, relents, clasps the younger brother in his arms, and the two go off, over each other's heads, in a burst of fraternal ecstasy.

A depressed and faded middle-aged lady, dressed in a scanty black silk dress, with a small arrangement of artificial flowers in her bosom, and wearing black mittens on her hands, then stepped nervously on the platform, and began to sing, in a weak faltering voice, a few verses of an Italian song, the purport of which did not reach us at our end of the room. She was suffering from extreme nervousness, and broke down twice or three times in the song she was endeavouring to sing.

I don't think I ever witnessed a more melancholy spectacle. The poor lady was received with an ironical cheer, which, in her innocence, she accepted as a compliment, and every verse was hailed with derisive shouts, which even she was unable to mistake, and, uttering an apology to the conductor, who appeared to be remonstrating with her in no measured terms, she left the stage amid a whirl of hooting and cat-call, which did not cease until a Favourite Delineator of Negro Peculiarities appeared, when it changed to a shout of applause.

"Maxwell," said I, "don't you know that poor woman's face?"

"No; I didn't notice her, poor creature."

"It's—Mrs. Talboys!" said I.

"Impossible!"

"But it is; I'm nearly sure of it. Here, waiter, who was the last singer?"

"What, her as made a mess on it?"

"Yes."

"Bernardini—Madame Bernardini. It's her fust night—she's on trial for an engagement. And," he added, "I expect it's her last."

There was little else to be got out of the waiter, so we were compelled to wait until we saw Levy. More comic singers, more acrobats, more niggers, and eventually poor little Emmie Talboys!

She was announced under a different pseudonym to that which her mother had adopted; but I had little difficulty in recognizing her. If anything else were wanted to place it beyond a doubt that Mrs. Talboys and Emmie, mother and daughter, had appeared before me that evening, it would have been found in the fact that the wretched bit of faded finery which Madame Bernardini had worn in her bosom, had been transferred to that of the poor trembling little woman who stood before me.

My heart seemed to rise to my throat as I looked upon the old love I had so long lost. The same gentle timid voice bore the accents of the same old pathetic air to my ears—she was singing the "Banks of Allan Water"—and the same mild appealing

face, sadly changed by privation, looked timidly on the audience as she concluded her song. She was received with insolent cheers, such as had greeted her poor mother half an hour before, and as she left the stage she stumbled, in her nervousness, over a nail in the floor, and fell heavily against the wing.

Maxwell and I started up to seek Levy, and we met him at the door, with our ten guineas in shillings and sixpences in his hand.

"Levy," said Maxwell, "who is that young girl that has just gone off?"

"Ah, Mishter Maxwell, what a chap you are!"

"Tell me her name, for God's sake, man!" said Maxwell, stamping with impatience.

"No, no, Mishter Maxwell; she's a good girl, she is—I don't like that sort of thing—she's a good girl, and you must leave her alone."

"Confound it, Levy, stop your infernal——no, no, I beg your pardon—there, you're a good fellow, and mean well—I honour you for it, but you mistake my meaning."

"Oh, it's all right is it, Mishter Maxwell. Well, you're a gentleman, and I don't believe you'd do a dirty thing. Her name is Talboysh—Talboysh."

"Then she and her mother are old and intimate friends of ours, and they are advertised for in to-day's 'Times.' For God's sake let us go to them!"

"You don't say so! Vell now, only to think! Come along with me—come along with me!"

And the good-natured little Jew led the way to the wretched apartment dignified by the title of "Artistes' room."

It was a square, whitewashed room, furnished with a deal table, a small cracked looking-glass, and half a dozen Windsor chairs; a pot of coarse *rouge* with a hare's-foot stood on the mantelpiece, and a well-filled subscription list for an injured acrobat hung on the wall. The room was strewn with comic hats, banjoes, wigs, and other properties in immediate use by the performers. Poor little Emmie lay on two chairs, almost insensible, while the vulgar, big-voiced woman (who had a big heart too) was bathing a wound in her forehead with a motherly tenderness which would have atoned for all her vulgarity twice told. Mrs. Talboys was hovering about her daughter in a helpless anxious way, invoking blessings on the comic lady who had taken the affair into her own hands, and who announced her intention of sending them home in her brougham after it had taken her to do her "turn" at the Polyhymnian.

We were not long in making ourselves known to Mrs. Talboys, and eventually to Emmie. She was at first distressed at our having discovered her under such circumstances, but very delighted to see us notwithstanding. We all went home to her poverty-stricken lodgings in the Camberwell Road together, and when there we gradually told Mrs. Talboys of the good fortune that awaited her.

It would be affectation to pretend that she felt

any sorrow for her husband's death, and we spent a couple of hours that night in mapping out the future, which was to be invested with such golden surroundings. They had had a hard time of it since they left London; their friends at Chester had procured her a little employment as a teacher in a National School, but poor little Emmie fell ill with scarlet fever, and Mrs. Talboys lost her situation in consequence. She then advertised as a morning governess, and obtained a little work in that capacity; but she was totally unfitted for the charge of children, and that source of income eventually failed her. Then she obtained a little employment as dresser and wardrobe woman at a provincial theatre, and eventually little Emmie made her appearance on the stage, but the poor timid little girl failed absolutely. For some months they obtained a precarious living by hanging about theatres and provincial concert-rooms, getting a little employment here, and a little employment there, until at length Mr. Levy, who happened to hear her singing at a provincial music hall, offered her an engagement in London at one pound ten a week, if, after a week's probation, she should be found up to the requirements of his audience.

That all went merrily with us after this, it is, I suppose, unnecessary to say. We took a pleasant cottage at Twickenham for Mrs. Talboys, with a pretty garden and a lawn sloping down to the Thames, and Maxwell and I used to pull up the river on fine summer evenings after our work was

done, and take tea with them in the open air. I leave you to imagine the happiness that these evenings afforded me. I leave you to imagine, also, that it was not very long before I found out that they afforded equal happiness to little Emmie. And I leave you to imagine how it all ended.



THE POLICE-RATE.

BY CLEMENT W. SCOTT.

THE POLICEMAN'S MANUSCRIPT.

CHAPTER I.

"How light the touches are that kiss
The music from the chords of life."

COVENTRY PATMORE.

AN early autumn evening was just closing in as a tumble-down old coach, wretchedly horsed, plashed through the red mud of the Froxfield Road, and the still redder leaves of Ailesbury Forest. Down the steep hill it came, past the pretty low cottages at its foot, and so dragged itself into the broad street of Clayborough.

"Will any of you gentlemen stop here?" said the very stout coachman, with a wink, as he pulled up his horses before an old-fashioned, many-gabled commercial inn in the middle of the street.

The "outsiders" looked at one another nervously and said nothing.

"Ah! you're green yet," sneered the corpulent Jehu, tugging again at his miserable horses, "next journey you'll not be frightened to taste old Jerry's beer, I'll be bound."

On went the coach again, sharp round the grey church at the bottom of the street, rumbling

along past a dead wall, until it stopped at the gates of Clayborough School.

And then the gates opened, and a string of unhappy-looking boys were ushered into the big, square court. They were all new boys, and this was their first introduction to the handsome "old house," with its solid stone portico, and the "new houses," square and ugly, and the white chapel, tucked away in the corner, and the racket-courts, and the hall, and the school-rooms, and the porter's lodge, with its "dreadful bell," and all the other mysteries and ins and outs connected with the famous school of Clayborough.

There are few more miserable periods in a boy's existence than the first night at a public school. The leading-strings have been cut, and from that moment the youngster has to fight for himself. All seems very strange, and life for the first time is very bitter. How cold the long dormitory looks, with its floors uncarpeted, and its rows of small white beds; and how dimly burns the solitary gas-lamp. How heartless seem the frequent questions about the father whose "God bless you, my boy!" is still ringing in Harry's ears, and how vulgar the jokes about the mother and sisters, who only a few hours ago were left standing on the door-step, crying bitterly at Willie's loss. But there must be no tears now. A new boy dare not be thought babyish, and he is expected to answer the questions like a man, and had better choke than let a tear be seen. But when the gas-lamp is extinguished, and

all is silent for the night, and when the chatter of the boys is hushed, and all is still, then the flood-gates of the heart may be opened, and new boys as well as old can sob themselves to sleep.

But this misery is of very short duration. The first sounds of chapel-bell, and the fear of being too late, added to the novelty of dressing in such a strange place, and being yelled at for washing in a basin which is the legitimate property of some old hand, prevent home thoughts from rising again, and call new boys to the responsibility of their position.

The best thing for new boys at a public school to do is to make friends with somebody at once. They generally choose out some one as new to the place as themselves, and so bear their trials and enjoy the novelty of the scene together.

It was under these circumstances that Bernard Gray first became acquainted with John Markby. It would have been difficult to find two boys more unlike one another in almost every quality. But extremes often meet. For the first few weeks after their arrival at Clayborough they were seldom apart, and every day at twelve o'clock used to take a constitutional down the Bath-road, turning back to dinner directly they met the coach. After a little time, however, each found his vocation, and, as it happened, each found a different one. Bernard Gray loved cricket and foot-ball, rackets and fives, and at all games longed to be "a swell," while Markby was a little bit of a naturalist and botanist,

and could sketch tolerably well, and would go for miles in search of a bird's-nest. He loved the old forest, and patronized squirrel hunts, and soon knew every inch of the country, and almost every tree for miles around. With tastes so dissimilar, added to the accident of their belonging to different houses, and becoming soon separated in farm work, it might be imagined that their friendship would not be of very long duration. They certainly did not see very much of one another in the week. Bernard would be fagging out on the first eleven, and getting proficient in the art of stopping a ball with his jacket, while Markby was rushing off to find some rare egg in a nest he had lately discovered in a secluded copse. Still there was a time when the best friends at Clayborough used always to meet. A walk after "middle chapel" on Sundays was usually devoted by the "Nisi" to the "Euryali" of Clayborough School. Then it was they talked of home, and their Sunday morning letters; then brothers walked out with brothers, and on a fine day the court and its neighbourhood was at this particular time always deserted. The home lives of the two boys were as dissimilar as their daily life at Clayborough. John Markby, in fact, had a home, which Bernard Gray had not. Bernard was born in Australia, and was sent to England to be educated a very short time before he made Markby's acquaintance. His story was a strange one. Perhaps it will be better to tell it in the same way that it was related to his friend Markby during one of

these pleasant Sunday walks some few years after their friendship first began.

"Of course, I can't vouch for the truth of the mysterious tale I'm going to tell you, old boy," said Bernard, laughing, as they sat down under a clump of beech-trees. "I will tell you the story just as it was told to me by means of a letter which was given me after my guardian's death. Here goes then.

"Very late one evening in the month of March, 18—, a woman dressed in deep mourning, with a thick crape veil, which quite concealed her features, knocked at the door of a house in one of the principal streets in Sydney, which belonged to a gentleman of the name of Mason. The servant opened the door, and the woman in black gave into her hands a small basket, with directions that it was to be given to Mr. Mason as soon as possible.

"And then she disappeared.

"Mr. Mason found in the hamper a chubby little child, and a letter, which ran pretty nearly as follows:—

"It seems as if I were born to ill-luck. I am the youngest child of a very large family, and it was as much as my parents, who were poor, hard-working people, could do to put bread into our mouths. I have experienced nothing all through my life but reverses and the bitterest misfortune. When at home I was neglected and looked down upon. My sisters, all considerably older than myself, ill-treated me, and if ever there was fault to be found, I was

the one who came in for all the abuse. I bore this harsh and degrading treatment for several years, but at last I could stand it no longer. I left my father's house. There is hardly any need to pursue this miserable story any further. I was never allowed to rise, and once having taken the fatal step of leaving my family, I sunk lower and lower still. Heaven only knows what will become of me now. People say that you are an honourable and charitable man. For mercy's sake take pity on this little one. He is christened Bernard. That God in his mercy will bless both you and him is the one prayer of his miserable and heart-broken mother.—C. G.'

"You can easily guess, old fellow," continued Bernard, "that the said chubby little child who was taken crying out of an uncomfortable hamper, is now sitting by your side. Mr. Mason put all the facts of the case in the possession of the police, and every effort was made to find "C. G." They traced a woman answering the description in nearly all particulars, who had been deserted by her husband, and died in great distress. It is an ugly story, and one which might, of course, be construed terribly to my disadvantage. Still I have a right to make out the best case for myself, and as my friends with the aid of the police are still prosecuting their inquiries, I may fairly hope for the best. This Mr. Mason was indeed a glorious man. He was an old bachelor, and having no chick or child of his own, and no one to interfere with his

whims, resolved to adopt me. He brought me up, and had just made up his mind to send me to some English public school, when he died. He left me a comfortable little provision for life; enough, I am sorry to say, to keep me if I like to be idle, but not sufficient to allow me to live decently without adopting some profession. I was soon sent over to England. Mr. Mason's desire of sending me to a good public school was fulfilled, and I think you know the rest. My first friend at dear old Clayborough was one John Markby, and I think since that eventful day when we drove up to the gates on the roof of the same coach, we have stuck together pretty well."

This story made a great impression on John Markby, and years afterwards he thought of the frank, open-hearted manner in which Bernard Gray told it that Sunday morning, as they sat under the beech trees at the edge of Ailesbury Forest, overlooking the valley in which the dull red town of Clayborough slept.

The scene is just going to change. Eight long years have passed since the old coach, loaded with new boys, stopped at the gates of Clayborough School, and now the same old coach may be seen creeping up the hill through the thick October mud. Two places on the roof have the same occupants that they had on that August evening eight years ago. They are young men now, and again they are very miserable. But how different is their misery! Years ago they were sick at heart

at the thoughts of leaving home and going to school, and now there are tears in their eyes when they think they have said good-bye to the dear old place in which so many friendships have been made, and in which the brightest years of their life have been spent.

The night before, when evening chapel was over, all the boys instinctively gathered round the gates. There was a dead silence in the court, and at last, isolated from the rest, were seen two young men walking arm-in-arm, their heads bent very low. And then the silence was broken by a voice, and it half trembled as it gave out—

“Three cheers for Markby and Gray.”

There was not a boy in all Clayborough School who did not swell the great deafening shout which arose at these magic words. And when the cheers had died away, the eyes of many of those who had shouted themselves hoarse, were wet.

They had done their work well these two, and now they were going up to Oxford to spread the name and the fame of the school they loved so bravely.

CHAPTER II.

"Let them fight it out, friend! things have gone too far;
God must judge the couple! leave them as they are:
Whichever one's the guiltless, to his glory;
And whichever one the guilt's with, to my story.

"Once more—Will the wronger, at this last of all,
Dare to say, 'I did wrong,' rising in his fall?
No? Let go, then! both the fighters to their places;
While I count three, step you back as many paces!

"I stand here now, he lies in his place;
Cover the face!"

ROBERT BROWNING.

THE scene has quite changed now, and more years have passed away. Bernard Gray is sitting in his chambers in King's Bench Walk, Temple, smoking a very long pipe. His life has been a strange one since he walked for the last time with his friend Markby, their surplices slung over their arms, round the pretty quad at Magdalen, through which the last notes of the organ pealed, and into which the roses peeped, and upon which the glorious tower looked down majestically. Here they had made great plans for the future, and parted for a long, long time as they both knew.

A hasty glance at a certain shelf in the book-case just by the side of Gray's chair, shows that the love for poetry which he acquired in his later days at Clayborough, and which was nursed at Oxford, is as warm as ever. There are the old copies of Keats

and Shelley, and Tennyson and Matthew Arnold, with its poem of Sohrab and Rustum, which was read to him, for the first time, at school in a friend's study after a jam tea, and which he then thought divine. And new volumes are side by side with his old friends, whose contents are dreamy and mystical and very precious. The numerous invitation cards and letters thrust into the frame of the looking-glass tell their own tale, and so do those ball programmes scribbled over with mysterious hieroglyphics and initials, which hang by their coloured ribbons, and swing restlessly over a trophy of crushed flowers and tiny kid gloves, and bits of torn edging and rent scraps of muslin, all most sacred to Bernard Gray's laundress, any interference with legitimate disorder of this kind being strictly forbidden. Photographs of popular French and English actors and actresses are scattered over the room; and as if to show the restless character of its master, and what varied tastes he has, there are Arundel Society chromos suspended from the walls in ecclesiastical-looking frames, and relics of all sorts picked up on various travels.

Bernard Gray has arrived at an uneasy period of his life, and is beginning to get fanciful, and imagine that nothing goes well with him. He is always trying to persuade himself that he will never get on at the bar, that he has wasted the best part of his life, and that it is really not worth while being energetic. On this particular day he has been strangely excited, and as he sits smoking in his

chair he experiences an inexplicable kind of fluttering sensation, and does not appear able to think quick enough.

On this eventful day he has met the only two people who could make him unusually excited, and certainly the two people he least expected to see.

Soon after Bernard left Oxford, during that unsettled period which falls to the lot of most men who have set their faces against ordination, and desire to have as much cricket and liberty with as little responsibility as possible, he obtained through his Australian connections the chance of a rather good tutorship.

He had been idling about London a good deal, and made rather an impression on his ex-trustee, whose house in town was always Bernard's own.

"I think I have got a chance of getting you just the kind of place you want, my boy," said this old gentleman to him one day after dinner. "Mr. Claughton, a great friend of mine, who was in Australia himself for a good many years, tells me that two of his boys, who are not quite old enough to go to school yet, are running about wild at his big house down in Somersetshire. It seems he wants some young Oxford man to be with them, nominally to coach them, but really to teach them how to play cricket, and to make them manly and honest boys. Would you like to go, Bernard? I think it is just the thing for you. You have seen all the theatres, and have been in London quite long enough; not

that I should ever like to part with you ; you know me better than that, old man."

"I don't think I ever should have had enough of London," replied Bernard, laughing, "but it really does seem a good bite. It will be a comfortable berth, at any rate, for the summer time ; the country is a good one for cricket, and if the boys are cheeky and bother me, I'll lick them well. If this Mr. Claughton likes the looks of me,* I'll go."

Mr. Claughton liked the looks of Bernard Gray uncommonly, and he went.

The time to see Ashton Grange to perfection is very early on one of those bright spring mornings when blue-bells and primroses cluster on the ground, and fresh green leaves and apple-blossoms wave overhead, and all nature seems shouting with delight that dreariness and wintry sorrow are over, and that so much happiness is at hand.

In the heart of an amphitheatre of Somersetshire hills, a long white house lies snug and sheltered. Around the house are noble trees and woods, with tangled paths, but before it the landscape sinks, and the waves of the Bristol Channel glitter in the distance. On one side of the Grange an old village church peeps through the tall trees, while on the other a smooth lawn, always gay with flowers, slopes gently up the hill, from the top of which the eye can take in a grand range of country, and wander now to the wooded Somersetshire hills on one side, and now to the long line of water on the other,

where the white-sailed ships may be watched coming up from the sea, until at last they are safe on the bosom of the river Avon, and soon are lost among the hills.

But it was not in the spring-time that Bernard Gray first saw Ashton Grange. The blue-bells and violets were dead, the university and public school matches were over at Lord's, and summer was well advanced, when Mr. Claughton's dog-cart dashed past the old tree in the village, and brought old Mrs. Parrett, who knows everything and everybody, out of her cottage, and set her puzzling her brains as to who the young-looking gentleman was that had come visiting at the Grange.

When they had passed the gates, and were coming up the drive, Bernard caught a glimpse of a white muslin dress on the circular grass-plot before the house. As the trap drew nearer, Bernard could discern more than a white muslin dress sweeping along the grass. He saw a tall graceful figure, and a profusion of rich gold hair, with which the setting sun seemed to be playing, and he saw some streamers of green ribbon which the breeze was vexing, and a plain gold cross. That was all he saw.

"Why, there's Amy actually playing croquet by herself," said Mr. Claughton, as the dog-cart twisted round the grass-plot and stopped at a low stone portico.

Amy Claughton caught up her dress in front, and was running towards her father, but she remem-

bered suddenly there was a stranger with him, and stopped short.

They had all got down now, and were standing on the gravel path.

"Amy, my darling, allow me to introduce you to our new friend and guest, Mr. Bernard Gray."

They both bowed. And then for the first time Bernard saw Amy Claughton's face, and when she had raised her eyes, he thought to himself that there was something besides tutorizing to be done at Ashton Grange.

This was the scene that came vividly before Bernard Gray's mind as he sat smoking after dinner in his chambers in King's Bench Walk. And from this scene came many thoughts. He thought of mornings in the fields and on horseback, and evenings in the woods, and excursions, and tender words and songs sung in the gloaming, and dangerous scraps of letters, and moments so precious that they thrilled him even now, after so many years had passed.

But there was a reverse to the picture.

There had been sweetness, and there had been sorrow too. Both had often said that their happiness, doubly precious in its secrecy, was too sweet to last, and so it turned out. Of course there came a time when the storm burst. Then came angry words, and unkindness, and threats; and Bernard, who at one time could never be too highly praised by his patron, was abused and called dishonourable and underhand, and was altogether in dreadful disgrace.

When Bernard Gray drove away again from Ashton Grange, the rain was pouring down in torrents, and it was all dark and hazy over the channel. The same fair face which he saw and loved before he entered the house, was the last he saw as he turned his back upon it for ever. It had smiled at him before from under a garden hat on the round grass plot, and now it just peeped at him over a white blind in an upper window. The smiles were changed to tears.

Amy Claughton's love for Bernard Gray might have been very strong, but far stronger was her father's ceaseless scolding and impertinent abuse. At any rate, the ungentlemanly tutor who had been pitchforked into a country house, and given every opportunity for feeding a very natural passion for a lovable girl, was soon forgotten by the very girl for whose sake he had got into disgrace, and she in turn was at once forgiven by her noisy and hot-headed parent. Soon peace prevailed at Ashton Grange, and all was as it used to be before the visit of the sentimental tutor. But all was not the same with Bernard Gray. Shocks of this kind don't, as a rule, suit men; that is to say, if they turn out to be, as this was, a very bitter shock indeed.

But how was it that all these old thoughts were harassing poor Bernard as he sat smoking in his chambers in the Temple. Strange to say, that very day he had met Amy Claughton at the Botanical Gardens, walking with her father. He had tried to avoid them, but this they would not allow. Ber-

nard's hand was seized, and in a few moments he might well have imagined that all his past misery was a dream.

They walked together some short time, and they all parted the best of friends. From the lips of Amy or her father, Bernard learnt that they had been some time abroad, and were now up in London for a few weeks. So much he actually heard, but from hints that were thrown out, and by a careful analysis of the manner of both during this brief conversation, he guessed a great deal more.

Mr. Claughton had evidently met somebody on his travels who, in a worldly point of view, would make an excellent husband for Amy. It seemed quite as evident that this somebody was objected to pretty strongly by the wilful daughter with the beautiful eyes. Mr. Claughton's good humour was thus very easily accounted for. He had been hasty, perhaps, but he had certainly done the right thing. Anyhow, there was no reason why he should not be very good friends with Bernard now. His will was once law, and it should be law again. So far, so good. But was it possible that Amy's warm welcome could be traced to some other cause? There was something in those eyes of hers which told Bernard that she longed to be forgiven. But Bernard had been deceived once, and did not wish to be deceived again.

Thus it will be seen that Bernard Gray had much to think about as he sat smoking in his chambers.

A loud knock at his oak roused him from his reverie, and it then flashed across him that he had met another friend that day.

While he was in the middle of his dinner at the round table at Simpson's, he saw a long beard and a moustache, of which he knew nothing, and a pair of eyes, with which he was very familiar. There was no mistaking the voice. It was John Markby. And now, according to promise, he had found out Bernard's rooms, and soon they were very full of smoke, and the two friends were telling the stories of their lives since that day when they parted in the cloisters at Magdalen.

Bernard Gray's story has already been told as he sat thinking in his chair, and now he was listening to the private history of his cynical friend, John Markby, who used to sneer at Bernard's sentiment and impressionable nature. Three most important things had happened. Markby had come in to a great deal of money; he had been travelling for some years; and lastly, in a fierce, rugged sort of fashion, he had fallen in love.

For hours and hours they talked, these men, and at last Markby got up to go.

"You don't look well, old fellow," said he, as he shook Bernard's hand. "I did not notice you were so pale when I came in. Good night. Mind you get to bed soon."

The door closed behind John Markby.

"What an unlucky brute I am," said Bernard, biting his lips. He had just clasped the hand of a

man who had been his warmest friend. Was he to be his bitterest enemy?

John Markby loved Amy Claughton, and there seemed every probability that she would be his wife.

No one knew better than Bernard **how** dangerous was the love which had **gradually** crept upon him, and which he had fed on for the last few years. He was not **what** the world would call an unprincipled man, but there are many men of the very highest principle who fail when placed in a similar position. When Markby had gone, Bernard reflected, and knew perfectly well that he was standing on the edge of a black ugly precipice. And then he calmly reviewed in his mind the utter hopelessness of his condition if he really did take the plunge. Then came that terrible feeling that he was powerless to resist and must jump, and he felt that strong love of his burning within him, and kindling a beautiful flame which he felt he ought to stifle, but knew he never would. Just for a little time he thought he might dream. He would be brave, and was determined not to burn his wings. He saw as clearly and distinctly as possible the black looks with which he would be greeted, and how he would be called dishonourable, and how old friends would turn their backs upon him and despise him for what they would call weakness. He was weak certainly, and that indescribable frenzy which kept running through all his veins threatened to destroy the better part of his nature. How he was tortured that night. Those

sweet eyes haunted him, and all his better sense seemed lost as he thought of the whispered words which so lately fell on his ears again. Soon he began to be flattered by the preference which he could not help thinking was shown him that day. Suppose Amy did not really like Markby. Suppose they were not engaged, or that the engagement could be broken off? Would it be dishonourable conduct to save her from an unattractive life? And then the tinge of romance which surrounded the whole affair offered him additional fascination. He had loved Amy before Markby had ever heard of her; why might not he love her now? These were the thoughts which kept chasing one another through Bernard's bewildered brain.

He threw open the window and looked out at the quiet river, over which the moon was shining, and watched a barge swing lazily up with the tide. He counted the lamps on the bridge flickering incessantly in the soft moonlight. And in the dark recesses of the picturesque black wharves he saw that bright face shining and still heard the voice. More hideous became the thought that all must be given up, more impossible the idea that he could forget he had ever seen her. And sweeter far than ever was that dreamy impossible future, stronger was hope, weaker was Bernard Gray.

A writing-desk was very near the window, and some note paper, which had been taken out and twice cast aside during this reverie, lay on the blotting-paper.

And then Bernard sat down at the desk, and before he went to bed had filled two sheets of paper with the thoughts of the last excited hour. These were posted to Amy Claughton the following day. This relieved him considerably, but it was a most fatal step.

The next time that the two friends met was at a ball given by a mutual friend of theirs. No wonder, indeed, that both had looked forward to it anxiously, but the anxiety of each could easily be traced to very different sources. Amy Claughton was to be there, and both Markby and Gray knew it.

Bernard now began to be frightened at what he had done, and cursed his stupidity for allowing his feelings so far to get the better of him as to write a letter which might put him in a very humiliating position.

But a scene occurred tolerably early in the evening which prevented the actors in this little drama from meeting that evening.

Bernard was nervous and absent, and was anxiously watching for Amy's entrance and longing to see her with Markby. He had hidden himself away in an obscure corner of the room, and felt like some criminal awaiting sentence.

John Markby was near the door. In taking out his pocket-handkerchief a little note tumbled on the ground. Markby was quite ignorant of what had happened and walked away. The note was sealed, but it bore no address.

A young fellow who was standing by—he was a

subaltern, and had lately joined his regiment—saw the note on the carpet, and perceiving that it bore no address, said to a friend who was with him, “that he might just as well open it as anyone else.”

He broke the seal and read the letter. Markby happened to pass at the time, and recognized both the letter and the handwriting.

“May I ask you where you got that letter?” said he, sharply.

“What on earth is that to you?” was the equally curt reply.

“I have not the honour of your acquaintance,” said Markby, getting very white, “but I shall not put up with any insult.”

“Oh! the letter is yours then, I suppose, since you make so much fuss about it,” said the little ensign, winking to his friend. “It is a pleasant kind of epistle, certainly.”

“I said nothing about its being mine. But I intend you to give it me all the same.”

“If it is not addressed to you, how do you know it is yours?”

“It is quite certain the letter does not belong to you. It is not the act of a gentleman to keep it.”

The ensign was argumentative and very cool. Markby had lost his temper.

“Pray who told you it was not my letter?” asked young Percival. “You see me with a letter in my hand, and although you cannot prove it belongs to you, you insist upon my delivering it into your hands. Have you lost a letter?”

Markby hesitated, and then he answered, "I do not know that I have."

"As I suppose you have been looking over my shoulder, perhaps you can enlighten me as to its contents?"

"I am not going to remain here arguing with you," said Markby, with a sneer. "Will you give up that letter?"

"Certainly, if you can prove you have a claim to it. Certainly not without."

"I think we had better get out of this room," said Markby. He gave a sign to Bernard to follow him, and then they all went downstairs and out of the house.

Young Percival was still very cool, and chaffed unmercifully.

Markby lost all command over himself, and in a few moments Mr. Percival had received a very sound thrashing.

It is generally believed that the days of duelling are over. In the army, however, there are many men who prefer the old and illegal method of settling a dispute, to the modern and somewhat degrading system of an action at law—at least, this is what they say over their wine.

In this case, at any rate, the foolish quarrel at the ball led to arrangements for a meeting. The officers of Percival's regiment took the matter up at Percival's request. Markby still obstinately refused to apologize, scorned a court of law and declined to put himself in the position of a prize-fighter.

Bernard was to be Markby's second, and his state of mind during the following week was certainly not an enviable one. Markby declined firmly to enlighten his friend as to the actual cause of the dispute.

"They had had a row," he said, "and Percival had grossly insulted him."

They were to meet in a field on the road to Hendon. Before going to bed the night before the eventful day, Markby wrote several letters. Over one, in particular, he was occupied a long time. As he sealed it he sighed heavily. Perhaps it was the last he would ever write.

Before the sun had risen, Markby had left home. At seven o'clock they were to meet, and before five he was knocking at Bernard's oak.

Bernard had not been in bed all night, but had been walking up and down the room racking his brains to devise some means whereby this absurd quarrel could be patched up. They could not possibly mean it to take a serious turn, he thought. The officers were only frightening Markby into an apology.

Directly Markby arrived at his friend's chambers he was asked, and most solemnly, first, whether he would tell the story of the quarrel, and secondly, if this absurd duel was really a serious affair.

Markby firmly declined to give in to Gray's entreaties. He thanked him affectionately for his anxiety, and all he had done; begged he would say no more; and having shaken him warmly by the

hand, they left the Temple and walked out into the cool morning air.

A little group had already assembled in the appointed field. Percival's brother officers never intended that this duel should be in any way a serious affair. The arrangements had been good fun, and little Percival had been talked to about "honour," with sham earnestness. Percival was quite conscious that he had behaved badly. Secretly he was inclined to apologize, but he did not like to appear cowardly, particularly when his brother officers had interested themselves in the matter.

Directly Gray and Markby arrived on the field, the former had a consultation with his brother second, Captain Proctor, and he at once saw, to his great delight, how matters stood.

Young Percival had been chaffed into a duel by his brother officers, while Markby, knowing that meetings of the kind do occasionally take place among army-men, was taken off his guard by the clever way in which the whole joke was carried out.

It was eventually agreed between Captain Proctor and Bernard, that neither of the principals should know of the *ruse*, and that each was to do his best to extract an apology from his man. They then exchanged pistols in order to withdraw the charges.

The hints that Captain Proctor had let fall about a letter, increased Bernard's anxiety to know all about the quarrel. Now for the first time he thought of Markby's position with regard to Amy Claughton,

and began to suspect that he had not read his own thoughts aright.

His appeal to Markby was, therefore, doubly earnest.

At last Markby's determination gave way, and he felt he could keep the secret no longer.

"Perhaps you are right, Bernard," said he, "you of all others ought to know everything. It was not obstinacy which closed my mouth to you, it was merely from motives of delicacy, knowing that there have been love passages between yourself and Miss Claughton. I have always refrained from inquiring into your little history with regard to Amy, and had no wish to pain you. Forgive me if I pain you now. Two days before this unfortunate *fracas* with Percival, on the very day, in fact, that I was in your chambers, I had an interview with Mr. Claughton. He formally gave his consent to my union with his daughter, both in her name and his own. One of Amy's letters—the first I ever received, and which up to this moment, I have never read—accidentally fell into Percival's hands. You can imagine how precious it is to me. I will have no half-measures; he must give up the letter, promising on his honour to divulge its contents to no living soul. The offer must come from him. He has made vulgar jokes about the writer of that letter, and an insult of that kind I cannot look over."

Instinctively Bernard Gray let fall the hand of his friend, which he had caught up in his excitement. A dull cold shiver ran through all his veins, and he

felt sick and faint. His best friend was, indeed, his worst enemy.

Gray left Markby and went across to Captain Proctor. The pistols were again exchanged. As he approached, Percival came frankly forward. "I have taken the advice of my brother officers," said he, "and at their request, beg to apologize most sincerely for my part of our quarrel the other evening. I am quite willing to give up the letter. I have shown it to no one, and I will hold the contents sacred, provided your friend expresses his regret at treating me in the manner he did."

He said this in a clear manly voice, and held out his hand when he had finished.

Gray was very pale and agitated. He hesitated for an instant, and half looked back to the place where Markby was standing, and then in a hoarse, unnatural voice he answered—

"My friend refuses to accept your apology."

"Capitally acted," whispered Captain Proctor to the regimental surgeon, who was standing by him. "He is determined to play out the farce."

In a few moments the sham combatants were face to face. All was very still, and then the signal was given.

The report was followed by a stifled cry, and John Markby fell at his friend's feet.

Bernard Gray had *forgotten* to extract the ball.

There was no time for inquiries, as a messenger at the moment came up to say that they had better separate, and quickly. The regimental surgeon ex-

examined the wound, and pronounced it very serious. He begged that he might be allowed to convey the sufferer to the hospital in his carriage immediately.

Gray consented, and would himself have accompanied them, but the report of the pistols had alarmed the neighbourhood, and they were already warned of the approach of the police. And so they all separated, and got to town as best they could.

The same evening, as Bernard was sitting in his chambers, a knock came at the door, and a non-commissioned officer handed him a packet. It contained a crumpled note, and a slip of paper on which was scribbled as follows :—

“MY DEAR SIR,—I am obliged to go out of town to-night, as I am told the police have got an inkling of the unhappy affair of this morning. I advise you of all others to keep out of the way. I have only just this instant heard, with very deep regret, that your friend died before he got to the hospital. Here is the unfortunate letter which caused our quarrel. I would have given anything that this should not have happened. It is an awful thing for both of us.—Yours in great haste,

“M. PRECIVAL.”

Bernard took up the miserable note—the note which Markby had never read—the note which had caused his death.

He read it through, and then throwing it on the ground, he covered his face with his hands, and groaned aloud. The note was very short, and in

affectionate terms bade John Markby think no more of Amy Claughton.

The evening was closing in.

The time throbbed on, and Bernard was awakened out of the dreamy state of stupefaction into which he had fallen by another loud knock at the door of his chambers.

A letter came tumbling out of the letter-box.

It was in the same handwriting as that of the note which was lying unheeded on the ground.

And there in the uncertain twilight, at the same window at which he had sat so recently and indulged in such a sweet reverie, Bernard Gray read bitter words, telling him he had ever had all the heart of A. C.

CHAPTER III.

"Can I love thee, my beloved, can I love thee?

And is't like love to stand

With no help in my hand,

When strong as death I fain would watch above thee?

My love-kiss can deny

No tear that falls beneath it,

Mine oath of love can swear thee

From no ill that comes near thee,

And thou diest while I breathe it.

And I, I can but die.

May God love thee, my beloved, may God love thee!"

E. BARRETT BROWNING.

TIMES have changed wonderfully. There have been happy days again at Ashton Grange. One fine morn-

ing, any one journeying through the village under the hill might have seen festoons of summer flowers, and a fair procession passing under the archway to the village church behind the trees. A few hours more, and a carriage with a pair of grey horses sweeps round the circular grass plot. Two familiar faces are smiling farewells from the inside, and a crowd of people is left standing near the stone portico, the men picking up the old slippers, and the women drying their eyes.

Once more, and for the last time, the scene is shifted. A little pony carriage is driving over an old stone bridge across the Thames. It is about six o'clock in the evening, the London train has arrived, and Amy Gray is driving her husband home to their tiny cottage, which they have christened "The Nest." It lies about a mile from the stone bridge over the Thames; its pretty garden slopes towards the still river, in which are reflected, as in a mirror, the tall trees which cluster in the Cliefden Woods. On this Friday night, about an hour after Amy had left her husband smoking his before-going-to-bed pipe, as she called it, and when all The Nest was very still, Bernard fancied he heard some one walking up the gravel path. He threw the magazine he was reading on one side, and listened. There was a gentle ring at the little door. Who could the visitor be at this extraordinary hour?

He opened the door. It was very dark, and Bernard could not recognize the features of the man who stood before him.

"I have something very important to tell you, Mr. Gray," the stranger said. "If you are alone, I think I had better come inside."

The voice made Bernard tremble. He looked again. Still he could not recognize the features.

"I am quite alone now. Pray come in."

The change from the dark garden to the bright little study was very sudden. When he had shut the door, Bernard looked full into the stranger's face.

His eyes met those of John Markby.

"Good God!" he said, and then sunk helplessly into the chair he had just left.

"You see I am not dead," said Markby, with a sneer. "I have come back to see my old friend."

Bernard hardly dared to look in his face.

"Where have you been all this long time?" he said.

"In Australia."

Bernard shuddered and turned away. After a little pause he almost whispered—

"They told me you were dead. Have you been long back?"

Again there was a long silence. At last Markby threw himself into a chair opposite that where Bernard was sitting, and looking him full in the face replied—

"Unfortunately for you, Bernard Gray, I did not die. The police found out all about the duel, and were hunting after me for a long time. I heard nothing from you, but about you I heard only too

much. You had as much right as I to love Amy Claughton. She encouraged you, and gave you the affection she always denied to me. In the madness of your love, however, you lost your better self. You were a false friend to me. You have married the woman whom I adored, but that I might have forgiven. I shall never forget your part in the mock duel. Years ago I heard from your own lips something of your early history. It was, perhaps, natural, that of a man who had inflicted on me two such fearful wounds I should wish to learn something more."

"What have you heard and learnt?"

"You shall hear every word. I have spared neither trouble nor expense, and the best officers of perhaps the best regulated police in the world have been in my pay. This is the result of my investigation. On the 25th March, 18—, was found, about two miles from Sydney, the body of a young woman. She was reported to have died from want of the common necessities of life. An old and valued servant of a rich merchant in Sydney, of the name of Mason, identified the black wearing apparel and veil as identical with those worn by a woman who left a basket at Mr. Mason's house. She was, without doubt, the same person who had left her child to the care of the philanthropic old gentleman."

"You need not continue this painful narrative," said Bernard. "I have long since known all these facts."

"I have not nearly done," said Markby, coldly. "I must beg that you will hear me to the end.

"The name of the young woman has been ascertained to be Caroline Gardiner. She was ill-treated by her family and left her home, and while wandering about in search of lodging and employment, attracted the attention of a gentleman holding a responsible position in a large mercantile firm in Sydney. This gentleman became passionately in love with the girl, who from all accounts was singularly beautiful. He obtained employment for her, in accordance with her express wish, and hardly a day passed that they did not meet. Eventually, he was suddenly summoned home to England to conduct a branch house of the business in London. Faithfully and solemnly he promised that the girl should follow him at the earliest opportunity. There was no time to make arrangements for her to accompany him. Caroline Gardiner gave birth to a son soon after her friend's departure, but she never heard a word from him again. His remittances soon ceased, and again distress came upon the poor girl. Frenzied with her misery, she left her little child at Mr. Mason's door and put an end to her miserable existence.

"Can you bear to hear the rest?"

"What more can there be to tell?"

"I promised you should hear all, so listen. I have found out the name of the man who left Caroline Gardiner to starve with her child in the streets

of Sydney. His name is Arthur Claughton, and his daughter is your wife!"

"You lie, John Markby," said Bernard, and in another moment his hands were at the throat of this most unwelcome guest.

Markby with great difficulty shook him off, and then rose to go.

"There is one person who can vouch for the truth of my story. Consult Arthur Claughton, and ask if I have spoken truly."

And then Markby left the friend he had once loved, sitting half-stupified in his chair.

About an hour afterwards Bernard took up the lamp and entered softly into his wife's room. She was sleeping very sweetly, her fair hair falling in thick masses over the pillow, and one arm stretched over to the vacant place by her side. As Bernard watched, one of the old smiles stole over her face, and her lips parted as if to kiss him. He dared not touch her lips for fear of waking her, but kneeling down by the bed-side he covered her white hand with tears and passionate kisses. And then he prayed a long earnest prayer, and stole quietly from the room. Again he entered the little study below, striving to believe that he had been asleep and dreaming, and that the events of the last hour had never occurred.

"If it were only a dream," he kept saying to himself, "if it were only a dream. He may have lied after all. It was a desperate game to play." And then he thought of the cold quiet river outside,

and wondered how he could tell this awful story to his wife.

"I will not believe it yet," said he. "Mr. Claughton shall tell me all."

And now, in the distance, he heard the quick sharp ring of a horse's hoofs. Nearer and nearer came the sound. Bernard listened if the horse would turn down by the lock towards the town. No, on it came, louder and louder still. Now it was passing the cottage. It stopped. Another quiet knock. Again he opened the door. It was a message, sent from London, to say Mr. Claughton had died suddenly.

"Would he come quickly?"

"Yes! he would come," and the messenger rode away.

Mr. Claughton dead, and no hope of solving the mystery now! Once more he threw himself into his chair, once more he thought of death. He had lost all count of time, and his brain seemed quite bewildered. He was in a dull heavy stupor when he heard a clock in the next room strike.

In an instant it flashed across him that he would take this as an omen.

"If it strikes an uneven number, John Markby's story is true," said he to himself.

Slowly the clock struck out the hour. Deliberately he counted.

"Twelve o'clock!" "Thank God!" he sighed.

The house was awfully still. To his horror he again heard a preparatory click, and amid this

terrible ~~silence~~ the clock struck for the ~~thirteenth~~ ^{supernatural} time!

* * * * *

When the bright morning sun burst through the curtains, and the birds were pouring forth their most joyous songs, the eyes of the wife, which had been closed as her husband was standing at her bedside, opened at last. Again the arm was stretched out, but still the place was empty.

When the funeral was over, Bernard commenced a search through Mr. Claughton's private papers. At the back of an old escritoire he found a small bundle of letters carefully tied up and docketed thus—"Letters concerning Alfred and C. G." The Australian police had been very vigilant, but there could be no doubt now that Bernard Gray had got ample proof that it was Arthur Claughton's twin brother, Alfred, who had left Caroline Gardiner to starve in the streets of Sydney. He had been dead some years. not true
depression

* * * * *

This is the last scene. The moorings have been cut, the air has rung with blessings and farewells, and a good old ship bound for Australia is bearing friends, families, and relations far away from the shores of England. John Markby is on board. He keeps his eyes firmly fixed on the flag-staff by the coast-guard station on the cliff, for there stand Bernard Gray and his wife, and there they have stood

since they bade farewell to one who, perhaps, may never return.

And now the white-sailed ship grows more and more indistinct in the distance, now it is only just visible,—now it is lost for ever!



UNITED SQUASHLEIGH.

UNITY.

DURING the last few sentences of this narrative, the intelligent countenance of the "Parochial" who sat nearest the door had expressed something like uneasiness, which was, perhaps, not to be wondered at, as the head of the landlord of the "Greyhound" had appeared suddenly, whispered something in his ear, and vanished. The reason of his head only appearing was attributable to the fact that he had kept his body outside the door and only opened a space for his face. He had a double purpose in this: first, to avoid interrupting the proceedings; secondly, to hide somebody who stood behind him.

"Gentlemen," said the Water-rate, whose benevolent countenance and silvery hair seemed to shine with a halo of pleasant emotion, "we've all met here for our own good, and I'm sure for our mutual profit also, and some of you will think it strange that I've kept a secret from you, on a matter that interests us all. But the secret was of a delicate nature, and dated from a week or more before we met here. It may seem almost wrong to say so, but that fire has been a blessing to the parish, and so strangely do things come about, that there is not a story amongst all those that have been told in this room more

remarkable than that in which we all have some part.

“Gentlemen, you are not, perhaps, aware that when that poor young creature, Miss Stow, left her uncle’s house—Old Ruffey’s house—she went straight to Miss Truffles’, at the library, and there kept in hiding for two or three days, till Doctor Pratt, who you know is manager of the Refuge, invited her to stay there, and treated her, I will say, like a lady, giving her even a servant to wait on her, and an apartment to herself.

“For, gentlemen, the strange part of the story is, that she had been married for nearly a twelve-month, and wasn’t Miss Stow at all, but Mrs. Richard Merton, and she’s at my house now—has been ever since the fire that our glorious Parson saved her from; and what’s more, gentlemen, my married daughter has come over to see me and to help to nurse the poor thing; for a little baby was born two days ago; and, gentlemen, they’re both doing as well as can possibly be expected, and—and—her husband’s outside now.”

Here the Water-rate broke down, and as he resumed his seat, the door opened, and in came Richard Merton. Not in custody, but with a radiant smile and a colour which was called into his face by the shout that greeted his appearance: such a shout as it would have done any man’s heart good to hear, and which was repeated when Cyril Smith came in after him—repeated with such variations as were caused by the breaking of pipes and glasses

in consequence of the blows with which each man smote the table before them.

But the parson held up his hand, and there came a sound of wheels in the passage, the door was pushed wide open, and who should make his appearance, propelled from behind, but Old Ruffey in a red night-cap and a Bath-chair. There was an ominous silence, for nobody quite knew how to greet him, and they all waited, as people wait just before the pantomime to see whether the villain of the preceding drama really *will* turn into the Clown.

Old Ruffey looked more like Pantaloon than Clown, but he shook his head a little mournfully, and said, "Serves me right. I know all that, but more changes than you think for have come about. You ask the parson, and he'll tell you that I caught the rheumatics walking in the rain to try and undo part of what I'd done amiss. And now, gentlemen, here's my niece's husband, Dick Merton, and he's staying at my house, and if you'll all do him the favour to come this day month to see him and his wife there, we shall have a bit of a house-warming, and I'll promise you a hearty welcome, mind that. Will you come?"

They all said they would, and one or two of them came round to his chair to shake hands with him. The "Water-rate" stayed there with his kind hand on the old man's shoulder.

It was strange, indeed, to think of Old Ruffey having his house refurnished, and the path mended, and the garden set to-rights, and all the stones taken

off the front steps, and a new brass knocker put on the street-door; stranger still to think of his appearing in a new suit of clothes, and a frilled shirt, when he went out to give such extensive orders to the wine-merchant, the pastrycook, and the green-grocer, that he was their best customer even though it only wanted a week to Christmas. But strangest of all to know that he really *did these things*; that he gave a house-warming such as everybody who was present has remembered with pleasure ever since; and that before the party broke up, he took the parson and two or three others into a room, where he at once settled eight thousand pounds upon Harriet Merton, by a deed which was witnessed by all the Rates and Taxes "in his presence and the presence of each other."

THE END.

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